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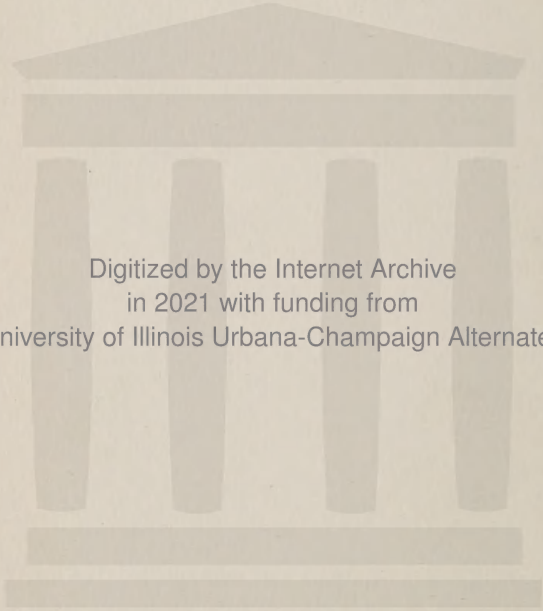

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CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

ROBERT BROWNING

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY ON BROWNING'S THEORY CONCERNING PERSONAL IMMORTALITY

AND NOTES

BY

HELOISE E. HERSEY

AND PREFACE BY

WILLIAM J. ROLFE, A.M.

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PREFACE.

When Miss Hersey and I were working together on the *Select Poems of Browning* last July, she suggested that an edition of the "Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day" might be an appropriate book for the coming holiday season. I assented most heartily, and urged her to prepare the book at once, that it might be in the printer's hands before I should return from Europe in October. My contribution to the work, I said, should be the Preface; and to this promise, made with little thought that it would be taken seriously, she and the publishers now hold me.

What more need I say? That I believe Browning to be a great religious poet, and why I believe it? But what could I say that has not been sufficiently said — and far better

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than I could put it — in Miss Hersey's introductory essay?

Let me simply commend both that and the poems which follow to all "Christen folk" as good reading for Christmas-Eve or Easter-Day, or any other time in the year.

W. J. ROLFE.

CAMBRIDGE, Dec. 16, 1886.

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THE THEORY OF ROBERT BROWNING

CONCERNING

PERSONAL IMMORTALITY.

"Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe:
But God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear;
The rest may reason and welcome: *'tis we musicians know.*" [1]

WITH such sublime confidence in his own inspiration Robert Browning speaks. Whatever we may think of him as a poet, or of his theory of poetry, there can be little difference of opinion about him as an intellect. He represents the most advanced, liberal, logical, scientific thought of the century. Not even an enemy can claim that Browning is in thraldom to Church or to Science. Like Bacon he has taken all knowledge for his province. There is no poet but Shakespeare who gives to even the cursory reader such an impression of wide range and strong grasp. Archdeacon Farrar reminded us that simply to read the tables of contents of the volumes of Browning's Poems is to make the whole circle of the problems and the experiences of life.

There is, then, a certain rare value in the thought of such a man on any one of the vital questions of the time. Robert Browning is a scholar. He is also a brave thinker, who does not fear the worst that truth can reveal. Add to these facts the further one, that (as many of us believe) he is a poet, with a royal commission to

[1] *Abt Vogler*, Robert Browning.

see and to expound things as they are, and there is reason enough for trying to find his theory on so vital a theme as that of Personal Immortality.

Perhaps such an investigation of the work of a great artist, made for the sake of discovering his belief on one of the thousand canons of life, may have an unpleasant suggestion of the attempt to submit a work of art to the analysis of the laboratory. I can say only, that I am aware of the force of the charge, but that the occasion seems to me to justify the attempt. The age seeks passionately any fact which throws light upon the next phase of the soul's life.

The artist comes that we may have life, and that we may have it more abundantly. The poet, especially, clings to life. From all time, he has sung the *Credo* of immortality. David hinted it before he even realized it; Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe — the poet of retribution, of reconciliation, and of unrest — have all celebrated it; but theirs has been for the most part a song of longing, and of consequent expectation, rather than of well-grounded belief. The argument from desire is so pretty that it ought to be useful as well; but the world lies in hunger and cold, longing for food and fire. No soul which sees life can fail to doubt, sometimes, if desire is indeed the *avant-courier* of satisfaction. In cool blood one has always had to reply to the poet's confident, "There is a life to come, because only by such life can the universe become a harmony," with, "But how do you know that the universe is meant to be a harmony?" It has remained for modern science to give to the poet a fact so cogent and reasonable that it is unassailable, and, at the same time, so lofty and majestic that it is fit stimulant for the highest imagination, — the fact of the persistence of force.

The most careful science of the day declares it absurd to suppose every energy of the universe conserved, except that marvelous energy which we call the human mind. If that goes out into blank non-activity at death, it is an absurdity beyond belief, the only instance of the destruction of a force.

Browning is the first poet who has assimilated this theory completely. It comes forward constantly in his poetry. It is evidently the foundation of his impregnable belief in immortality.[1]

Browning believes that the soul will continue, because no force nor motion can be lost. For the proof of this conviction of the permanence of spiritual power, one citation is so complete that it may serve for the score which might be given:

"There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before
The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound;
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more:
On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round.

"All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist;
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.

. . . . . .

"And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
For the fulness of the days? Have we withered or agonized?
Why else was the pause prolonged, but that singing might issue thence?
Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony should be prized?"[2]

[1] The reader must distinguish, as the writer will endeavor to do, between the phrase "Personal Immortality" and the term "Immortality." I do not wish to represent Browning as claiming so manifest a logical impossibility as that, because no force is wasted, each unit of force will remain forever apart from all other units. I shall hope to show presently that Browning's belief in *personal* immortality rests upon another set of facts.

[2] *Abt Vogler*, stanzas 9, 10, 11.

This exposition is perfect enough to satisfy the logician. Indeed, it is so complete as to make us doubt whether the poet, so much as the philosopher, speaks. *Abt Vogler* would have been greater poetry if it had been less evident syllogistic reasoning.

But we come to the next step in Browning's theory of the universe. Granting that force must persist, he is still fronted by the question, "What, then, is the significance of this life? Why the struggle, the darkness, the failure, or even the success? If all effort is permanent, if the thing that hath been is that which shall be, why all the stress and strain of earth?" To these questions he proposes an answer so simple that it might seem borrowed from the cant of the pseudo-theologian, did we not know the honesty and the scientific spirit of the man. He replies: "This life is a test, an epoch, — brief, it is true, but *determining the direction of the persisting force.* Energy is bound to survive in some form or other; but its form of survival is the grand enigma which this world settles." Let the poet speak for himself.

Christmas-Eve and *Easter-Day* are rendered doubly important, in such a study as this, by the fact that they are the solitary poems in which Browning speaks without the cothurnus of the drama. In *Easter-Day* the soul is pictured as surprised by the Judgment-Day:

> "In very deed
> (I uttered to myself) that Day!
> The intuition burned away
> All darkness from my spirit too:
> There stood I, found and fixed, I knew,
> *Choosing the world.*
> . . . . . .
> Since my life had end
> And my choice with it — best defend,
> Applaud both!
> . . . . . .

A voice
Beside me spoke thus, 'Life is done,
Time ends, Eternity 's begun,
And thou art judged forevermore.'

. . . . . .

'This world,
This finite life thou hast preferred,
In disbelief of God's own word,
To heaven and to infinity.
Here the probation was for thee,
To show thy soul the earthly mixed
With heavenly it must choose betwixt.
The earthly joys lay palpable,—
A taint, in each, distinct as well;
The heavenly flitted, faint and rare,
Above them, but as truly were
Taintless, so, in their nature, best.
Thy choice was earth: thou didst attest
'Twas fitter spirit should subserve
The flesh, than flesh refine to nerve
Beneath the spirit's play.

. . . . . .

Thou art shut
Out of the heaven of spirit; glut
Thy sense upon the world: 'tis thine
Forever,—take it!'"[1]

Browning dwells with ever-deepening seriousness on the eternal nature of human, earthly *choice*. It may be instantaneous, it may be despairing, it may be at the last moment,—all these hopes he will hold out to us; but when it comes, it *determines*. We may grumble at the nature of the task set before us, but the demand is inexorable. If we dally, we lose. But ever so feebly to choose heaven, to refuse earth, is to win eternal life. This brief outline of his theory must now be filled out

[1] *Easter-Day*, xvi., xvii., xx.

by a group of citations. The first is from the lips of the Pope, in *The Ring and the Book*. He says to Caponsacchi, the brave, tempted, conquering, triumphant, heart-broken young priest:

> "Never again elude the choice of tints;
> White shall not neutralize the black, nor good
> Compensate bad in man, absolve him so;
> *Life's business being just the terrible choice.*" [1]

Again the Pope speaks:

> "Is this our ultimate stage? or starting-place
> To try man's foot, if it will creep or climb,
> 'Mid obstacles in seeming, points that prove
> Advantage for who vaults from low to high,
> And makes the stumbling-block a stepping-stone?" [2]

Still again:

> "Life is probation, and this earth no goal,
> But starting-point of man."

There was never more lofty condemnation of the querulous spirit which criticises the plan by which the soul wins from earth's struggle immortal life:

> "Is God mocked, as He asks?
> Shall I take on me to change his tasks,
> And dare, dispatched to a river-head
> For a simple draught of the element,
> Neglect the thing for which He sent,
> And return with another thing instead? —
> Saying, 'Because the water found
> Welling up from underground
> Is mingled with the taints of earth,
> While Thou, I know, dost laugh at dearth,
> And couldst at wink or word convulse

[1] *The Pope*, l. 1234. [2] *The Pope*, l. 409.

The world with the leap of a river-pulse!—
Therefore I turned from the oozings muddy,
And bring Thee a chalice I found instead:
See the brave veins in the breccia ruddy!
One would suppose that the marble bled.
What matters the water? A hope I have nursed
The waterless cup will quench my thirst.'
Better have knelt at the poorest stream
That trickles in pain from the straitest rift;
For the less or the more is all God's gift,
Who blocks up or breaks wide the granite seam."[1]

The soul which accepts its conditions thrives and strengthens with the struggle:

"When the fight begins within himself,
A man 's worth something."[2]

"I count life just a stuff
To try the soul's strength on, educe the man.
Who keeps one end in view, makes all things serve."[3]

In *Saul*, Browning speaks of this life as

"The dream, the probation, the prelude,"[4]

and foresees the man, now sore beset,

"By the pain-throb triumphantly winning intensified bliss,
And the next world's reward and repose by the struggle in this."[5]

The Ring and the Book is one long, splendid argument for another life. Its general nature is that of the so-called moral argument. Human justice, with its inadequacy, must be a prophecy of a divine justice, complete and satisfying. But I want here to cite three memorable passages which concern the relation of choice to eternal

[1] *Christmas-Day*, xxii.
[2] *Bishop Blougram's Apology*.
[3] *In a Balcony*, Part Third.
[4] *Saul*, xvii.
[5] *Saul*, xvii.

destiny. The first is one of the most terrible that Browning has written. Count Guido — a profligate, a liar, a murderer — has filled up the measure of his crimes. Here at last is come

> "a devil more damn'd
> In evils to top Macbeth."

He has shamefully deceived Pompilia, the cleanest, most child-like soul that ever lived. He has held her bound on the rack of hideous moral torture for two years. At last he has murdered her and both her foster-parents. Caponsacchi, a young priest, has made a brave attempt, half successful, to save Pompilia. He has learned the beauty of her soul and the incredible deformity of Guido's. In an impassioned speech before the judges of the cause, he depicts the future of the Count:

> "And thus I see him slowly and surely edged
> Off all the table-land whence life upsprings
> Aspiring to be immortality.
> . . . . . .
> So I lose Guido in the loneliness,
> Silence, and dusk, till at the doleful end,
> At the horizontal line, creation's verge,
> From what just is, to absolute nothingness —
> Lo, what is this he meets, strains onward still?
> What other man, deep further in the fate,
> Who, turning at the prize of a footfall
> To flatter him and promise fellowship,
> Discovers in the act a frightful face —
> Judas, made monstrous by much solitude!
> . . . . . .
> There let them grapple, denizens o' the dark,
> Foes or friends, but indissolubly bound,
> In their one spot out of the ken of God
> Or care of man for ever and evermore." [1]

[1] *Giuseppe Caponsacchi*, l. 1898.

But even for this creature, unmatched in history but by Judas, the godly Pope has a shadow of a hope. If there be but the least chance for so depraved a soul, no pain is too great, and no judgment too severe, to win it. As the Pope signs Guido's death-warrant he exclaims:

"I stood at Naples once, a night so dark
I could have scarce conjectured there was earth
Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all;
But the night's black was burst through by a blaze —
Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore,
Through her whole length of mountain visible;
There lay the city — thick and plain with spires,
And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea.
So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see one instant and be saved."[1]

It is of course most fitting that the murdered Pompilia should have a word of hope and mercy for her husband. One faintest desire after righteousness will, she believes, bring forgiveness:

"But where will God be absent? In His face
Is light, but in His shadow healing, too!
Let Guido *touch the shadow*, and be healed!"[2]

The value of struggle, the stimulus of temptation, the saving power of pain, — these are the gracious lights in "this present evil world."

"Was the trial sore?
Temptation sharp? Thank God a second time!
Why comes temptation but for man to meet
And master and make crouch beneath his foot,
And so be pedestalled in triumph? Pray
'Lead us into no such temptations, Lord!'
Yea, but, O Thou whose servants are the bold,
Lead such temptations by the head and hair,
Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight,
That so he may do battle and have praise."[3]

[1] *The Pope*, l. 2133. [2] *Pompilia*, l. 1720. [3] *The Pope*, l. 1182.

No modern theologian believes more completely in the development of character by the experiences of life than does Robert Browning. If he is set down by some theologians as an irreligious poet, it is because — along with this conviction held in common with the Calvinists — he has the other conviction that the fittest and only the fittest will survive. This is modern doctrine. We have accustomed ourselves to it in the realm of animal life, so that the phrase no longer shocks us. We are content that the age of the mastodon is past. We practise the selecting process with our domestic animals. We even look on, with regret truly, but with repose, while the weakest is pushed to the wall in the struggle between labor and capital. But we are not yet accustomed to regard God as the originator of all this mighty system, whose primary law is, "To him that hath shall be given." Still less are we ready to spur our imagination to the task of conceiving a coming phase of life where the process shall go on eternally, where good shall enlarge and expand, and where evil shall slowly but surely gather its folds about its victim — say, rather, about its *lover* — until all life and all desire for life go out together. To this realization Robert Browning has come. The power which conquers the universe is a moral power. This moral power has its root in choice, — human choice made in this world.

> "There's a fancy some lean to and others hate —
> That, when this life is ended, begins
> New work for the soul in another state,
> Where it strives and gets weary, loses and wins:
> Where the strong and the weak, this world's congeries,
> Repeat in large what they practised in small,
> Through life after life in unlimited series;
> Only the scale's to be changed, that's all.

Yet I hardly know. When a soul has seen,
By the means of Evil, that Good is best,
And, through earth and its noise, what is heaven's serene,—
When its faith in the same has stood the test—
Why, the child grown man, you burn the rod,
The uses of labor are surely done;
There remaineth a rest for the people of God:
And I have had troubles enough, for one."[1]

Out of Browning's conviction of the omnipotence of individual, earthly choice comes his belief in *individual* persistence. "Why such pains," he asks, "to develop the force of a *person*, unless that force is to remain?" By every charm of which poetry is mistress he labors to convince us that he speaks truth when he says,

"And I shall behold Thee, face to face, O God!"

Browning has one poem which avowedly deals with this subject alone,—*La Saisiaz*. It is too complex in emotion to be fairly quotable. I commend it to my readers in its completeness. But I must say that, unlike most of Browning's work, it has in it the note of personal feeling, sorrow, disturbance. It seems to me less valuable as a test of its author's real, established thought about the secret of life than many of the more scattered touches.

There is no way of accounting for Browning's passion for the development of the individual except by saying that he sees the vision of the future in which the individual persists. He will that the impulses of the human soul be worked out at all hazards. Fear, faltering, irresolution,—what are all these but paraphrases for weak personality? These are the foes against which he sets his fiercest lance. No poem has been more perversely

[1] *Old Pictures in Florence*, stanzas 21, 22.

interpreted than *The Statue and the Bust.* Its whole force lies in the lines which so sublimely condense the parable of the Foolish Virgins:

"The sin I impute to each frustrate ghost
Was the unlit lamp and the ungirt lion."[1]

The same feeling is the *motif* of that crux of American Browning students, *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came.* On this Mr. Arlo Bates has given us recently so perfect a prose variation — he disclaims the word "explanation" — that I must rather quote him than paraphrase him. "Childe Roland is the most supreme expression of a noble allegiance to an ideal, — the most absolute faithfulness to a principle, regardless of all else. . . . What does it matter what the tower signifies, — whether it be this, that, or the other? The essential thing is that, after a lifetime pledged to this, — whatever the ideal may be, — the opportunity has come after a cumulative series of disappointments, and more than all amid an overwhelming sense that failure must be certain where so many have failed. . . . And the sublime climax comes in the *constancy of the hero:*

'In a sheet of flame
I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set
And blew!'"[2]

Constancy, courage, resolution, — these are the virtues which save character.

But one more step and my analysis is complete. These are the high, difficult virtues. A great teacher says,

[1] *The Statue and the Bust,* p. 123.
[2] *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came,* End.

"Be strong, be brave, and you shall live!" But must he answer to the cry, "How can we find strength and courage?"—"I do not know."? Certainly Browning has a more hopeful reply.

Sidney Lanier tells us that the last twenty centuries have spent their best power upon the development of the idea of personality. Literature, education, government, and religion have learned to recognize the individual as the unit of force. Browning goes a step further. He declares that so powerful is a complete personality that its very touch gives life and courage and potency. He turns to history for the inspiration of enduring virtue and the stimulus for sustained effort, and he finds both in Jesus Christ. In him is, at once, the possibility, the promise, and the proof that each human soul may live forever. Personality — symmetrical and unmarred — is divine. To love a completely noble person is to have in one's soul the supreme stimulus to noble and persistent action. No lower motive will avail. Love is the only force which conquers easily and invariably the temptations to irresolution and cowardice. Strong virtue is instantly preferred to weak yielding, because no sacrifice is so painful as would be the sense of shocked and injured love. So divine ingenuity takes advantage of every human function for purposes of help. The imagination is quickened by the figure of the Christ, the heart is touched by his pain, and the brain fired by his courage and persistence. God will not transcend his laws to preserve a human soul, but he will devise means for saving it within these laws.

> "And thence I conclude that the real God-function
> Is to furnish a motive and injunction
> For practising what we know already."

Such a motive, Browning goes on to declare, is Christ. Man —

> "Gropes for something more substantial
> Than a fable, myth, or personification.
> May Christ do for him what no mere man can,
> And stand confessed as the God of salvation!"[1]

In concluding, I want to notice three poems of Browning in which this potency of the Christ motive is declared and explained. They will rank among his very greatest poems in point of artistic form as well as in ethical meaning. They are *A Death in the Desert*, *The Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician*, and *Saul*.

A Death in the Desert is a monologue given by a disciple of John, and describing the last hour of the Apostle. The scene is sketched, — a solitary cave, in whose midchamber —

> "Since noon's light reached there a little,"

bedded on a camel-skin, the old man lies unconscious. He rouses at the very end, and makes a supreme effort for a last word of cheer to his disciples. He feels the cloud of doubt gathering about his followers. When he shall die, —

> "There is left on earth
> No one alive who knew (consider this!) —
> Saw with his eyes and handled with his hands
> That which was from the first the Word of Life."

Upon him is the full need for complete human assurance. Judge with what intensity he speaks. He meets and faces the most dangerous arguments against the religion of Christ. His weapons may be held in trem-

[1] *Christmas-Eve.*

bling hands, but they are potent yet. He recalls for the listening group the person and the ineffable love of Christ. Then he breathes once more the secret of this life:

"For life, with all it yields of joy and woe,
And hope and fear, — believe the aged friend, —
Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,
How love might be, hath been indeed, and is;
And that we hold thenceforth to the uttermost
Such prize despite the envy of the world,
And, having gained truth, keep truth: that is all.
. . . . . .
Helpful was the light,
And warmth was cherishing, and food was choice
To every man's flesh, thousand years ago,
As now to yours and mine; the body sprang
At once to the height and stayed; but the soul, — no!
Since sages who, this noontide, meditate
In Rome or Athens, may descry some point
Of the eternal power, hid yester eve;
And as thereby the power's whole mass extends,
So much extends the ether floating o'er
The love that tops the might, the Christ in God.
. . . . . .
I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it,
And has so far advanced thee to be wise."

The whole poem is subtle and mystical; but once understood it is rich in suggestion. The growth of the soul, its new powers born to-day out of the weaknesses of yesterday, its certainties, its hopes, are all touched with the hand of poet and philosopher.

The Epistle of Karshish is addressed to a wise doctor, Ahib, by a young disciple. It relates in friendly yet scientific tone a meeting of Karshish with a strange

man, — Lazarus. The conviction of Lazarus that he was raised from the dead by a Nazarene is treated, of course, like a curious delusion. But struggling under this calm incredulity of the physician is the passionate desire of the human soul for a personal affection and a personal force outside itself and omnipotent. I quote two short passages in which the contest between the doubt of the scientist and the longing of the child reaches its climax:

> "This man so cured regards the curer then,
> As — God forgive me — who but God himself,
> Creator and Sustainer of the world,
> That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile! —
> 'Sayeth that such an One was born and lived,
> Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own house,
> Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I know,
> And yet was . . . what I said nor choose repeat,
> And must have so avouched himself, in fact,
> In hearing of this very Lazarus
> Who saith — but why all this of what he saith?
> Why write of trivial matters, things of price
> Calling at every moment for remark?
> . . . . . .
> The very God! think, Ahib! dost thou think?
> So, the All-Great were the All-Loving, too —
> So, through the thunder comes a human voice
> Saying, 'O heart I made, a heart beats here!
> Face my hands fashioned, see it in myself.
> Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,
> But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
> And thou must love me who have died for thee!
> The madman saith He said so; it is strange.'"

Saul is a dramatic monologue from the lips of David. It describes one of those strange interviews between himself and Saul when the soul of the king was recalled from its wanderings by means of music. David

finds an "agonized Saul, drear and stark, blind and dumb." Then he sings to him, — first, the songs of the people — the sheep call, the reapers' tune, the funeral hymn. Then comes a great melody of patriotism, —

"All
Brought to blaze on the head of one creature, — King Saul!"

David promises him such fame as the world has not known.

"Each deed thou hast done
Dies, revives, goes to work in the world —
. . . . . .
Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long over, shall thrill
Thy whole people, the countless, with ardor.
. . . . . .
So the pen gives unborn generations their due and their part
In thy being! Then, first of the mighty, thank God that thou art!"

But David feels how empty is the promise of immortal *fame* to the soul craving immortal *life*. It is a stirring strain. But the weakness which paralyzes the Positivist is in his song. The immortality of the race and the permanence of human society are truths, but they fall far short of being the whole truth. Without the vision of the dignity of the Person, the world becomes a crude rehearsal of some great drama, with the heroic parts all silenced. As David sings, a dream quickens within him. Out of the darkness of the age gleams the great Christ-figure — the warm personal presence — which is alone sufficient to enliven and sustain the struggling powers of the captive king.

"O Saul, it shall be
A face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me
Thou shalt love and be loved by forever; a hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See, the Christ
stand!"

A Personal Force comes to the aid of a personal struggle.. Browning believes so firmly that only such a Force can avail in such a struggle that he suggests to us the miracle of its revelation even in the century of David. If that is anthropomorphism, the readers of the most modern of poets must make the most of it. The hope of permanent influence in society is not enough for the soul which longs to live consciously and forever. Browning promises us, by the mouth of David, a double immortality — one in the influences which we have initiated; but the other, and the larger and more vital, in the characters which we have completed.

To such a life Browning calls the soul. He has satisfied himself that force persists, that mind is the supreme force, that personal character is the highest fruit of mind. The worth and permanence of the individual soul is revealed to him as a certainty. He stands in a throng of poets, some of whom commend us to nature as the source of peace, some, to the future of humanity, some, to the joys of the moment. But —

"He, there, with the brand flamboyant broad o'er night's forlorn abyss,
Crowned by prose and verse; and wielding with Wit's bauble, Learning's rod —
Well? — Why, he at least believed in Soul, was very sure of God."

HELOISE EDWINA HERSEY.

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY.

FLORENCE, 1850.

CHRISTMAS-EVE.

I.

Out of the little chapel I burst,
Into the fresh night-air again.
Five minutes full I waited, first
In the doorway, to escape the rain
That drove in gusts down the common's centre,
At the edge of which the chapel stands,
Before I plucked up heart to enter.
Heaven knows how many sorts of hands
Reached past me, groping for the latch
Of the inner door that hung on catch,
More obstinate the more they fumbled,
Till, giving way at last with a scold
Of the crazy hinge, in squeezed or tumbled
One sheep more to the rest in fold,
And left me irresolute, standing sentry
In the sheepfold's lath-and-plaster entry,
Four feet long by two feet wide,
Partitioned off from the vast inside—
I blocked up half of it at least.
No remedy; the rain kept driving.
They eyed me much as some wild beast,
That congregation, still arriving,
Some of them by the main road, white
A long way past me into the night,
Skirting the common, then diverging;

Not a few suddenly emerging
From the common's self through the paling-gaps, —
They house in the gravel-pits perhaps,
Where the road stops short with its safeguard border
Of lamps, as tired of such disorder; —
But the most turned in yet more abruptly
From a certain squalid knot of alleys,
Where the town's bad blood once slept corruptly,
Which now the little chapel rallies
And leads into day again, — its priestliness
Lending itself to hide their beastliness
So cleverly (thanks in part to the mason),
And putting so cheery a whitewashed face on
Those neophytes too much in lack of it,
That, where you cross the common as I did,
And meet the party thus presided,
"Mount Zion" with Love-lane at the back of it,
They front you as little disconcerted
As, bound for the hills, her fate averted,
And her wicked people made to mind him,
Lot might have marched with Gomorrah behind him.

II.

Well, from the road, the lanes, or the common,
In came the flock: the fat weary woman,
Panting and bewildered, down-clapping
Her umbrella with a mighty report,
Grounded it by me, wry and flapping,
A wreck of whalebones; then, with a snort,
Like a startled horse, at the interloper

(Who humbly knew himself improper,
But could not shrink up small enough) —
Round to the door, and in, — the gruff
Hinge's invariable scold
Making my very blood run cold.
Prompt in the wake of her, up-pattered
On broken clogs, the many-tattered,
Little, old-faced, peaking, sister-turned-mother
Of the sickly babe she tried to smother
Somehow up, with its spotted face,
From the cold, on her breast, the one warm place;
She too must stop, wring the poor ends dry
Of a draggled shawl, and add thereby
Her tribute to the door-mat, sopping
Already from my own clothes' dropping,
Which yet she seemed to grudge I should stand on;
Then, stooping down to take off her pattens,
She bore them defiantly, in each hand one,
Planted together before her breast
And its babe, as good as a lance in rest.
Close on her heels, the dingy satins
Of a female something, past me flitted,
With lips as much too white, as a streak
Lay far too red on each hollow cheek;
And it seemed the very door-hinge pitied
All that was left of a woman once,
Holding at least its tongue for the nonce.
Then a tall yellow man, like the Penitent Thief,
With his jaw bound up in a handkerchief,
And eyelids screwed together tight,

Led himself in by some inner light.
And, except from him, from each that entered,
I got the same interrogation —
"What, you, the alien, you have ventured
To take with us, the elect, your station?
A carer for none of it, a Gallio?" —
Thus, plain as print, I read the glance
At a common prey, in each countenance
As of huntsman giving his hounds the tallyho.
And, when the door's cry drowned their wonder,
The draught, it always sent in shutting,
Made the flame of the single tallow candle
In the cracked square lantern I stood under,
Shoot its blue lip at me, rebutting,
As it were, the luckless cause of scandal:
I verily fancied the zealous light,
(In the chapel's secret, too!) for spite
Would shudder itself clean off the wick,
With the airs of a Saint John's Candlestick.
There was no standing it much longer.
"Good folks," thought I, as resolve grew stronger,
"This way you perform the Grand-Inquisitor,
When the weather sends you a chance visitor?
You are the men, and wisdom shall die with you,
And none of the old Seven Churches vie with you!
But still, despite the pretty perfection
To which you carry your trick of exclusiveness,
And, taking God's word under wise protection,
Correct its tendency to diffusiveness,
And bid one reach it over hot ploughshares, —

Still, as I say, though you've found salvation,
If I should choose to cry, as now, 'Shares!' —
See if the best of you bars me my ration!
I prefer, if you please, for my expounder
Of the laws of the feast, the feast's own Founder;
Mine's the same right with your poorest and sickliest,
Supposing I don the marriage-vestiment:
So, shut your mouth and open your Testament,
And carve me my portion at your quickliest!"
Accordingly, as a shoemaker's lad
With wizened face in want of soap,
And wet apron wound round his waist like a rope,
(After stopping outside, for his cough was bad,
To get the fit over, poor gentle creature,
And so avoid disturbing the preacher) —
Passed in, I sent my elbow spikewise
At the shutting door, and entered likewise,
Received the hinge's accustomed greeting,
And crossed the threshold's magic pentacle,
And found myself in full conventicle, —
To wit, in Zion Chapel Meeting,
On the Christmas-Eve of 'Forty-nine,
Which, calling its flock to their special clover,
Found all assembled and one sheep over,
Whose lot, as the weather pleased, was mine.

III.

I very soon had enough of it.
The hot smell and the human noises,
And my neighbor's coat, the greasy cuff of it,

Were a pebble-stone that a child's hand poises,
Compared with the pig-of-lead-like pressure
Of the preaching-man's immense stupidity,
As he poured his doctrine forth, full measure,
To meet his audience's avidity.
You needed not the wit of the Sibyl
To guess the cause of it all, in a twinkling:
No sooner got our friend an inkling
Of treasure hid in the Holy Bible,
(Whene'er 'twas that the thought first struck him,
How death, at unawares, might duck him
Deeper than the grave, and quench
The gin-shop's light in hell's grim drench)
Than he handled it so, in fine irreverence,
As to hug the book of books to pieces:
And, a patchwork of chapters and texts in severance,
Not improved by the private dog's-ears and creases,
Having clothed his own soul with, he'd fain see
equipt yours, —
So, tossed you again your Holy Scriptures.
And you picked them up, in a sense, no doubt:
Nay, had but a single face of my neighbors
Appeared to suspect that the preacher's labors
Were help which the world could be saved without,
'Tis odds but I might have borne in quiet
A qualm or two at my spiritual diet,
Or — (who can tell?) — perchance even mustered
Somewhat to urge in behalf of the sermon:
But the flock sat on, divinely flustered,
Sniffing, methought, its dew of Hermon

With such content in every snuffle,
As the devil inside us loves to ruffle.
My old fat woman purred with pleasure,
And thumb round thumb went twirling faster,
While she, to his periods keeping measure,
Maternally devoured the pastor.
The man with the handkerchief untied it,
Showed us a horrible wen inside it,
Gave his eyelids yet another screwing,
And rocked himself as the woman was doing.
The shoemaker's lad, discreetly choking,
Kept down his cough. 'Twas too provoking!
My gorge rose at the nonsense and stuff of it;
So, saying like Eve when she plucked the apple,
"I wanted a taste, and now there 's enough of it,"
I flung out of the little chapel.

IV.

There was a lull in the rain, a lull
In the wind too; the moon was risen,
And would have shone out pure and full,
But for the ramparted cloud-prison,
Block on block built up in the West,
For what purpose the wind knows best,
Who changes his mind continually.
And the empty other half of the sky
Seemed in its silence as if it knew
What, any moment, might look through
A chance gap in that fortress massy: —

Through its fissures you got hints
Of the flying moon, by the shifting tints,
Now, a dull lion-color, now, brassy
Burning to yellow, and whitest yellow,
Like furnace-smoke just ere the flames bellow,
All a-simmer with intense strain
To let her through, — then blank again,
At the hope of her appearance failing.
Just by the chapel, a break in the railing
Shows a narrow path directly across;
'Tis ever dry walking there, on the moss —
Besides, you go gently all the way uphill.
I stooped under and soon felt better;
My head grew lighter, my limbs more supple,
As I walked on, glad to have slipt the fetter.
My mind was full of the scene I had left,
That placid flock, that pastor vociferant, —
How this outside was pure and different!
The sermon, now — what a mingled weft
Of good and ill! were either less,
Its fellow had colored the whole distinctly;
But alas for the excellent earnestness,
And the truths, quite true if stated succinctly,
But as surely false, in their quaint presentment,
However to pastor and flock's contentment!
Say, rather, such truths looked false to your eyes,
With his provings and parallels twisted and twined,
Till how could you know them, grown double their size
In the natural fog of the good man's mind,

Like yonder spots of our roadside lamps
Haloed about with the common's damps?
Truth remains true, the fault's in the prover;
The zeal was good, and the aspiration;
And yet, and yet, yet, fifty times over,
Pharaoh received no demonstration
By his Baker's dream of Baskets Three,
Of the doctrine of the Trinity, —
Although, as our preacher thus embellished it,
Apparently his hearers relished it
With so unfeigned a gust — who knows if
They did not prefer our friend to Joseph?
But so it is everywhere, one way with all of them!
These people have really felt, no doubt,
A something, the motion they style the Call of them;
And this is their method of bringing about,
By a mechanism of words and tones,
(So many texts in so many groans)
A sort of reviving or reproducing,
More or less perfectly — (who can tell?) —
Of the mood itself, that strengthens by using;
And how it happens, I understand well.
A tune was born in my head last week,
Out of the thump-thump and shriek-shriek
Of the train, as I came by it, up from Manchester;
And when, next week, I take it back again,
My head will sing to the engine's clack again,
While it only makes my neighbor's haunches stir, —
Finding no dormant musical sprout
in him, as in me, to be jolted out.

'Tis the taught already that profits by teaching;
He gets no more from the railway's preaching
Than, from this preacher who does the rail's office, I;
Whom therefore the flock cast a jealous eye on.
Still, why paint over their door "Mount Zion,"
To which all flesh shall come, saith the prophecy?

V.

But wherefore be harsh on a single case?
After how many modes, this Christmas-Eve,
Does the selfsame weary thing take place?
The same endeavor to make you believe,
And with much the same effect, no more:
Each method abundantly convincing,
As I say, to those convinced before,
But scarce to be swallowed without wincing,
By the not-as-yet-convinced. For me,
I have my own church equally:
And in this church my faith sprang first!
(I said, as I reached the rising ground,
And the wind began again, with a burst
Of rain in my face, and a glad rebound
From the heart beneath, as if, God speeding me,
I entered His church-door, Nature leading me),—
In youth I looked to these very skies,
And, probing their immensities,
I found God there, His visible power;
Yet felt in my heart, amid all its sense
Of the power, an equal evidence
That His love, there too, was the nobler dower.

For the loving worm within its clod
Were diviner than a loveless god
Amid his worlds, I will dare to say.
You know what I mean: God 's all, man 's naught:
But also, God, whose pleasure brought
Man into being, stands away
As it were a handbreadth off, to give
Room for the newly-made to live,
And look at Him from a place apart,
And use His gifts of brain and heart,
Given, indeed, but to keep for ever.
Who speaks of man, then, must not sever
Man's very elements from man,
Saying, "But all is God's" — whose plan
Was to create man and then leave him
Able, His own word saith, to grieve Him,
But able to glorify Him too,
As a mere machine could never do,
That prayed or praised, all unaware
Of its fitness for aught but praise and prayer,
Made perfect as a thing of course.
Man, therefore, stands on his own stock
Of love and power as a pin-point rock,
And, looking to God who ordained divorce
Of the rock from His boundless continent,
Sees, in His power made evident,
Only excess by a million-fold
O'er the power God gave man in the mould.
For, note: man's hand, first formed to carry
A few pounds' weight, when taught to marry

Its strength with an engine's, lifts a mountain, —
Advancing in power by one degree;
And why count steps through eternity?
But love is the ever-springing fountain:
Man may enlarge or narrow his bed
For the water's play, but the water-head —
How can he multiply or reduce it?
As easy create it, as cause it to cease;
He may profit by it, or abuse it,
But 'tis not a thing to bear increase
As power does: be love less or more
In the heart of man, he keeps it shut
Or opes it wide, as he pleases, but
Love's sum remains what it was before.
So, gazing up, in my youth, at love
As seen through power, ever above
All modes which make it manifest,
My soul brought all to a single test —
That He, the Eternal First and Last,
Who, in His power, had so surpassed
All man conceives of what is might, —
Whose wisdom, too, showed infinite, —
Would prove as infinitely good;
Would never (my soul understood),
With power to work all love desires,
Bestow e'en less than man requires:
That He who endlessly was teaching,
Above my spirit's utmost reaching,
What love can do in the leaf or stone
(So that to master this alone,

This done in the stone or leaf for me,
I must go on learning endlessly)
Would never need that I, in turn,
Should point Him out defect unheeded,
And show that God had yet to learn
What the meanest human creature needed, —
Not life, to wit, for a few short years,
Tracking his way through doubts and fears,
While the stupid earth on which I stay
Suffers no change, but passive adds
Its myriad years to myriads,
Though I, He gave it to, decay,
Seeing death come and choose about me,
And my dearest ones depart without me.
No: love which, on earth, amid all the shows of it,
Has ever been seen the sole good of life in it,
The love, ever growing there, spite of the strife in it,
Shall arise, made perfect, from death's repose of it!
And I shall behold Thee, face to face,
O God, and in Thy light retrace
How in all I loved here, still wast Thou!
Whom pressing to, then, as I fain would now,
I shall find as able to satiate
The love, Thy gift, as my spirit's wonder
Thou art able to quicken and sublimate,
With this sky of Thine that I now walk under,
And glory in Thee for, as I gaze
Thus, thus! Oh, let men keep their ways
Of seeking Thee in a narrow shrine —
Be this my way! And this is mine!

VI.

For lo, what think you? suddenly
The rain and the wind ceased, and the sky
Received at once the full fruition
Of the moon's consummate apparition.
The black cloud-barricade was riven,
Ruined beneath her feet, and driven
Deep in the West; while, bare and breathless,
North and South and East lay ready
For a glorious thing, that, dauntless, deathless,
Sprang across them and stood steady.
'Twas a moon-rainbow, vast and perfect,
From heaven to heaven extending, perfect
As the mother-moon's self, full in face.
It rose, distinctly at the base
With its seven proper colors chorded,
Which still, in the rising, were compressed,
Until at last they coalesced,
And supreme the spectral creature lorded
In a triumph of whitest white, —
Above which intervened the night.
But above night too, like only the next,
The second of a wondrous sequence,
Reaching in rare and rarer frequence,
Till the heaven of heavens were circumflexed,
Another rainbow rose, a mightier,
Fainter, flushier, and flightier, —
Rapture dying along its verge!
Oh, whose foot shall I see emerge,

Whose, from the straining topmost dark,
On to the keystone of that arc?

VII.

This sight was shown me, there and then, —
Me, one out of a world of men,
Singled forth, as the chance might hap
To another if, in a thunderclap
Where I heard noise and you saw flame,
Some one man knew God called his name.
For me, I think I said, "Appear!
Good were it to be ever here.
If Thou wilt, let me build to Thee
Service-tabernacles three,
Where, forever in Thy presence,
In ecstatic acquiescence,
Far alike from thriftless learning
And ignorance's undiscerning,
I may worship and remain!"
Thus at the show above me, gazing
With upturned eyes, I felt my brain
Glutted with the glory, blazing
Throughout its whole mass, over and under,
Until at length it burst asunder,
And out of it bodily there streamed
The too-much glory, as it seemed,
Passing from out me to the ground,
Then palely serpentining round
Into the dark with mazy error.

VIII.

All at once I looked up with terror.
He was there.
He Himself with His human air,
On the narrow pathway, just before.
I saw the back of Him, no more —
He had left the chapel, then, as I.
I forgot all about the sky.
No face : only the sight
Of a sweepy garment, vast and white,
With a hem that I could recognize.
I felt terror, no surprise ;
My mind filled with the cataract,
At one bound, of the mighty fact.
"I remember, He did say
Doubtless, that, to this world's end,
Where two or three should meet and pray,
He would be in the midst, their friend ;
Certainly He was there with them."
And my pulses leaped for joy
Of the golden thought without alloy,
That I saw His very vesture's hem.
Then rushed the blood back, cold and clear,
With a fresh enhancing shiver of fear,
And I hastened, cried out while I pressed
To the salvation of the vest,
"But not so, Lord! It cannot be
That Thou, indeed, art leaving me —
Me, that have despised Thy friends!

Did my heart make no amends?
Thou art the love of God — above
His power, didst hear me place His love,
And that was leaving the world for Thee:
Therefore Thou must not turn from me
As if I had chosen the other part.
Folly and pride o'ercame my heart.
Our best is bad, nor bears Thy test;
Still, it should be our very best.
I thought it best that Thou, the Spirit,
Be worshipped in spirit and in truth,
And in beauty, as even we require it —
Not in the forms burlesque, uncouth,
I left but now, as scarcely fitted
For Thee: I knew not what I pitied.
But, all I felt there, right or wrong,
What is it to Thee, who curest sinning?
Am I not weak as Thou art strong?
I have looked to Thee from the beginning,
Straight up to Thee through all the world
Which, like an idle scroll, lay furled
To nothingness on either side:
And since the time Thou wast descried,
Spite of the weak heart, so have I
Lived ever, and so fain would die,
Living and dying, Thee before!
But if Thou leavest me — "

IX.

Less or more,
I suppose that I spoke thus.
When, — have mercy, Lord, on us ! —
The whole Face turned upon me full.
And I spread myself beneath it,
As when the bleacher spreads, to seethe it
In the cleansing sun, his wool, —
Steeps in the flood of noontide whiteness
Some defiled, discolored web —
So lay I, saturate with brightness.
And when the flood appeared to ebb,
Lo, I was walking, light and swift,
With my senses settling fast and steadying,
But my body caught up in the whirl and drift
Of the vesture's amplitude, still eddying
On, just before me, still to be followed,
As it carried me after with its motion :
What shall I say ? — as a path were hollowed
And a man went weltering through the ocean,
Sucked along in the flying wake
Of the luminous water-snake.
Darkness and cold were cloven, as through
I passed, upborne yet walking too.
And I turned to myself at intervals, —
"So He said, and so it befalls.
God who registers the cup
Of mere cold water, for His sake
To a disciple rendered up,
Disdains not His own thirst to slake

At the poorest love was ever offered:
And because it was my heart I proffered.
With true love trembling at the brim,
He suffers me to follow Him
For ever, my own way, — dispensed
From seeking to be influenced
By all the less immediate ways
That earth, in worships manifold,
Adopts to reach, by prayer and praise,
The garment's hem, which, lo, I hold!"

X.

And so we crossed the world and stopped.
For where am I, in city or plain,
Since I am 'ware of the world again?
And what is this that rises propped
With pillars of prodigious girth?
Is it really on the earth,
This miraculous Dome of God?
Has the angel's measuring-rod
Which numbered cubits, gem from gem,
'Twixt the gates of the New Jerusalem,
Meted it out, — and what he meted,
Have the sons of men completed? —
Binding, ever as he bade,
Columns in this colonnade
With arms wide open to embrace
The entry of the human race
To the breast of . . . what is it, yon building,
Ablaze in front, all paint and gilding,

With marble for brick, and stones of price
For garniture of the edifice?
Now I see; it is no dream;
It stands there and it does not seem:
For ever, in pictures, thus it looks,
And thus I have read of it in books
Often in England, leagues away,
And wondered how these fountains play,
Growing up eternally,
Each to a musical water-tree,
Whose blossoms drop, a glittering boon,
Before my eyes, in the light of the moon,
To the granite lavers underneath.
Liar and dreamer in your teeth!
I, the sinner that speak to you,
Was in Rome this night, and stood, and knew
Both this and more. For see, for see,
The dark is rent, mine eye is free
To pierce the crust of the outer wall,
And I view inside, and all there, all,
As the swarming hollow of a hive,
The whole Basilica alive!
Men in the chancel, body, and nave,
Men on the pillars' architrave,
Men on the statues, men on the tombs
With popes and kings in their porphyry wombs.
All famishing in expectation
Of the main-altar's consummation.
For see, for see, the rapturous moment
Approaches, and earth's best endowment

Blends with heaven's; the taper-fires
Pant up, the winding brazen spires
Heave loftier yet the baldachin;
The incense-gaspings, long kept in,
Suspire in clouds; the organ blatant
Holds his breath and grovels latent,
As if God's hushing finger grazed him
(Like Behemoth when He praised him)
At the silver bell's shrill tinkling,
Quick cold drops of terror sprinkling
On the sudden pavement strewed
With faces of the multitude.
Earth breaks up, time drops away,
In flows heaven, with its new day
Of endless life, when He who trod,
Very man and very God,
This earth in weakness, shame, and pain,
Dying the death whose signs remain
Up yonder on the accursed tree, —
Shall come again, no more to be
Of captivity the thrall,
But the one God, All in all,
King of kings, Lord of lords,
As His servant John received the words,
"I died, and live forevermore!"

XI.

Yet I was left outside the door.
"Why sit I here on the threshold-stone,
Left till He return, alone

Save for the garment's extreme fold
Abandoned still to bless my hold?"
My reason, to my doubt, replied,
As if a book were opened wide,
And at a certain page I traced
Every record undefaced,
Added by successive years, —
The harvestings of truth's stray ears
Singly gleaned, and in one sheaf
Bound together for belief.
"Yes," I said — "that He will go
And sit with these in turn, I know.
Their faith's heart beats, though her head swims
Too giddily to guide her limbs,
Disabled by their palsy-stroke
From propping me. Though Rome's gross yoke
Drops off, no more to be endured,
Her teaching is not so obscured
By errors and perversities,
That no truth shines athwart the lies:
And He, whose eye detects a spark
Even where, to man's, the whole seems dark, —
May well see flame where each beholder
Acknowledges the embers smoulder.
But I, a mere man, fear to quit
The clue God gave me as most fit
To guide my footsteps through life's maze,
Because Himself discerns all ways
Open to reach Him: I, a man
Able to mark where faith began

To swerve aside, till from its summit
Judgment drops her damning plummet,
Pronouncing such a fatal space
Departed from the Founder's base:
He will not bid me enter too,
But rather sit, as now I do,
Awaiting His return outside." —
'Twas thus my reason straight replied,
And joyously I turned, and pressed
The garment's skirt upon my breast,
Until, afresh its light suffusing me,
My heart cried, "What has been abusing me
That I should wait here lonely and coldly,
Instead of rising, entering boldly,
Baring truth's face, and letting drift
Her veils of lies as they choose to shift?
Do these men praise Him? I will raise
My voice up to their point of praise!
I see the error; but above
The scope of error, see the love. —
O, love of those first Christian days! —
Fanned so soon into a blaze,
From the spark preserved by the trampled sect,
That the antique sovereign Intellect
Which then sat ruling in the world,
Like a change in dreams, was hurled
From the throne he reigned upon: —
You looked up, and he was gone!
Gone, his glory of the pen! —
Love, with Greece and Rome in ken,

Bade her scribes abhor the trick
Of poetry and rhetoric,
And exult, with hearts set free,
In blessed imbecility
Scrawled, perchance, on some torn sheet,
Leaving Sallust incomplete.
Gone, his pride of sculptor, painter! —
Love, while able to acquaint her
With the thousand statues yet
Fresh from chisel, pictures wet
From brush, she saw on every side,
Chose rather with an infant's pride
To frame those portents which impart
Such unction to true Christian Art.
Gone, music too! The air was stirred
By happy wings: Terpander's bird
(That, when the cold came, fled away) —
Would tarry not the wintry day, —
As more-enduring sculpture must,
Till filthy saints rebuked the gust
With which they chanced to get a sight
Of some dear naked Aphrodite
They glanced a thought above the toes of,
By breaking zealously her nose off.
Love, surely, from that music's lingering,
Might have filched her organ-fingering,
Nor chosen rather to set prayings
To hog-grunts, praises to horse-neighings.
Love was the startling thing, the new;
Love was the all-sufficient too;

And seeing that, you see the rest:
As a babe can find its mother's breast
As well in darkness as in light,
Love shut our eyes, and all seemed right.
True, the world's eyes are open now: —
Less need for me to disallow
Some few that keep Love's zone unbuckled,
Peevish as ever to be suckled,
Lulled by the same old baby-prattle
With intermixture of the rattle,
When she would have them creep, stand steady
Upon their feet, or walk already,
Not to speak of trying to climb.
I will be wise another time,
And not desire a wall between us,
When next I see a church-roof cover
So many species of one genus,
All with foreheads bearing *lover*
Written above the earnest eyes of them;
All with breasts that beat for beauty,
Whether sublimed, to the surprise of them,
In noble daring, steadfast duty,
The heroic in passion, or in action, —
Or, lowered for senses' satisfaction,
To the mere outside of human creatures,
Mere perfect form and faultless features.
What? with all Rome here, whence to levy
Such contributions to their appetite,
With women and men in a gorgeous bevy,
They take, as it were, a padlock, clap it tight

On their southern eyes, restrained from feeding
On the glories of their ancient reading,
On the beauties of their modern singing,
On the wonders of the builder's bringing,
On the majesties of Art around them, —
And, all these loves, late struggling incessant,
When faith has at last united and bound them,
They offer up to God for a present?
Why, I will, on the whole, be rather proud of it,—
And, only taking the act in reference
To the other recipients who might have allowed of it,
I will rejoice that God had the preference."

XII.

So I summed up my new resolves:
"Too much love there can never be.
And where the intellect devolves
Its function on love exclusively,
I, a man who possesses both,
Will accept the provision, nothing loth, —
Will feast my love, then depart elsewhere,
That my intellect may find its share.
And ponder, O soul, the while thou departest,
And see thou applaud the great heart of the artist,
Who, examining the capabilities
Of the block of marble he has to fashion
Into a type of thought or passion, —
Not always, using obvious facilities,
Shapes it, as any artist can,
Into a perfect symmetrical man,

Complete from head to foot of the life-size,
Such as old Adam stood in his wife's eyes,—
But, now and then, bravely aspires to consummate
A Colossus by no means so easy to come at,
And uses the whole of his block for the bust,
Leaving the mind of the public to finish it,
Since cut it ruefully short he must:
On the face alone he expends his devotion,
He rather would mar than resolve to diminish it,—
Saying, 'Applaud me of this grand notion
Of what a face may be! As for completing it,
In breast and body and limbs, do that, you!'
All hail! I fancy how, happily meeting it,
A trunk and legs would perfect the statue,
Could man carve so as to answer volition.
And how much nobler than petty cavils,
Were a hope to find, in my spirit-travels,
Some artist of another ambition,
Who having a block to carve, no bigger,
Has spent his power on the opposite quest,
And belived to begin at the feet was best—
For so may I see, ere I die, the whole figure!"

XIII.

No sooner said than out in the night!
My heart beat lighter and more light:
And still, as before, I was walking swift,
With my senses settling fast and steadying,
But my body caught up in the whirl and drift
Of the vesture's amplitude, still eddying

On just before me, still to be followed,
As it carried me after with its motion, —
What shall I say? — as a path were hollowed,
And a man went weltering through the ocean,
Sucked along in the flying wake
Of the luminous water-snake.

XIV.

Alone! I am left alone once more —
(Save for the garment's extreme fold
Abandoned still to bless my hold)
Alone, beside the entrance-door
Of a sort of temple, — perhaps a college, —
Like nothing I ever saw before
At home in England, to my knowledge.
The tall, old, quaint, irregular town!
It may be . . though which, I can't affirm . . any
Of the famous middle-age towns of Germany;
And this flight of stairs where I sit down,
Is it Halle, Weimar, Cassel, or Frankfort,
Or Göttingen, that I have to thank for 't?
It may be Göttingen, — most likely.
Through the open door I catch obliquely
Glimpses of a lecture-hall;
And not a bad assembly neither —
Ranged decent and symmetrical
On benches, waiting what 's to see there;
Which, holding still by the vesture's hem,
I also resolve to see with them,
Cautious this time how I suffer to slip

The chance of joining in fellowship
With any that call themselves His friends,
As these folks do, I have a notion.
But hist — a buzzing and emotion!
All settle themselves, the while ascends
By the creaking rail to the lecture-desk,
Step by step, deliberate
Because of his cranium's over-freight,
Three parts sublime to one grotesque,
If I have proved an accurate guesser,
The hawk-nosed, high-cheek-boned Professor.
I felt at once as if there ran
A shoot of love from my heart to the man —
That sallow, virgin-minded, studious
Martyr to mild enthusiasm,
As he uttered a kind of cough-preludious
That woke my sympathetic spasm,
(Beside some spitting that made me sorry)
And stood, surveying his auditory
With a wan pure look, well-nigh celestial, —
Those blue eyes had survived so much!
While, under the foot they could not smutch,
Lay all the fleshly and the bestial.
Over he bowed, and arranged his notes,
Till the auditory's clearing of throats
Was done with, died into a silence;
And, when each glance was upward sent,
Each bearded mouth composed intent,
And a pin might be heard drop half a mile hence, —
He pushed back higher his spectacles,

Let the eyes stream out like lamps from cells,
And giving his head of hair — a hake
Of undressed tow, for color and quantity —
One rapid and impatient shake,
(As our own young England adjusts a jaunty tie
When about to impart, on mature digestion,
Some thrilling view of the surplice-question) —
The Professor's grave voice, sweet though hoarse,
Broke into his Christmas-Eve discourse.

XV.

And he began it by observing
How reason dictated that men
Should rectify the natural swerving,
By a reversion, now and then,
To the well-heads of knowledge, few
And far away, whence rolling grew
The life-stream wide whereat we drink,
Commingled, as we needs must think,
With waters alien to the source;
To do which, aimed this eve's discourse:
Since, where could be a fitter time
For tracing backward to its prime,
This Christianity, this lake,
This reservoir, whereat we slake,
From one or other bank, our thirst?
So, he proposed inquiring first
Into the various sources whence
This Myth of Christ is derivable;
Demanding from the evidence

(Since plainly no such life was liveable)
How these phenomena should class?
Whether 't were best opine Christ was,
Or never was at all, or whether
He was and was not, both together —
It matters little for the name,
So the idea be left the same.
Only, for practical purpose' sake
'T was obviously as well to take
The popular story, — understanding
How the ineptitude of the time,
And the penman's prejudice, expanding
Fact into fable fit for the clime,
Had, by slow and sure degrees, translated it
Into this myth, this Individuum, —
Which, when reason had strained and abated it
Of foreign matter, left, for residuum,
A Man! — a right true man, however,
Whose work was worthy a man's endeavor;
Work, that gave warrant almost sufficient
To his disciples, for rather believing
He was just omnipotent and omniscient,
As it gives to us, for as frankly receiving
His word, their tradition, — which, though it meant
Something entirely different
From all that those who only heard it,
In their simplicity thought and averred it,
Had yet a meaning quite as respectable:
For, among other doctrines delectable,
Was he not surely the first to insist on

The natural sovereignty of our race? —
Here the lecturer came to a pausing-place.
And while his cough, like a drouthy piston,
Tried to dislodge the husk that grew to him,
I seized the occasion of bidding adieu to him,
The vesture still within my hand.

XVI.

I could interpret its command.
This time He would not bid me enter
The exhausted air-bell of the Critic.
Truth's atmosphere may grow mephitic
When Papist struggles with Dissenter,
Impregnating its pristine clarity, —
One, by his daily fare's vulgarity,
Its gust of broken meat and garlic; —
One, by his soul's too-much presuming
To turn the frankincense's fuming
And vapors of the candle starlike
Into the cloud her wings she buoys on.
Each, that thus sets the pure air seething,
May poison it for healthy breathing —
But the Critic leaves no air to poison;
Pumps out with ruthless ingenuity
Atom by atom, and leaves you — vacuity.
Thus much of Christ, does he reject?
And what retain? His intellect?
What is it I must reverence duly?
Poor intellect for worship, truly,
Which tells me simply what was told

(If mere morality, bereft
Of the God in Christ, be all that 's left)
Elsewhere by voices manifold;
With this advantage, that the stater
Made nowise the important stumble
Of adding, he, the sage and humble,
Was also one with the Creator.
You urge Christ's followers' simplicity:
But how does shifting blame, evade it?
Have wisdom's words no more felicity?
The stumbling-block, His speech — who laid it?
How comes it that for one found able
To sift the truth of it from fable,
Millions believe it to the letter?
Christ's goodness, then — does that fare better?
Strange goodness, which upon the score
Of being goodness, the mere due
Of man to fellow-man, much more
To God, — should take another view
Of its possessor's privilege,
And bid him rule his race! You pledge
Your fealty to such rule? What, all —
From heavenly John and Attic Paul,
And that brave weather-battered Peter
Whose stout faith only stood completer
For buffets, sinning to be pardoned,
As, more his hands hauled nets, they hardened, —
All, down to you, the man of men,
Professing here at Göttingen,
Compose Christ's flock! They, you, and I

Are sheep of a good man! and why?
The goodness, — how did he acquire it?
Was it self-gained, did God inspire it?
Choose which; then tell me, on what ground
Should its possessor dare propound
His claim to rise o'er us an inch?
Were goodness all some man's invention,
Who arbitrarily made mention
What we should follow, and whence flinch, —
What qualities might take the style
Of right and wrong, — and had such guessing
Met with as general acquiescing
As graced the alphabet erewhile,
When A got leave an Ox to be,
No Camel (quoth the Jews) like G, —
For thus inventing thing and title
Worship were that man's fit requital.
But if the common conscience must
Be ultimately judge, adjust
Its apt name to each quality
Already known, — I would decree
Worship for such mere demonstration
And simple work of nomenclature,
Only the day I praised, not nature.
But Harvey, for the circulation.
I would praise such a Christ, with pride
And joy, that He, as none beside,
Had taught us how to keep the mind
God gave Him, as God gave His kind
Freer than they from fleshly taint:

I would call such a Christ our Saint,
As I declare our Poet, him
Whose insight makes all others dim:
A thousand poets pried at life,
And only one amid the strife
Rose to be Shakespeare: each shall take
His crown, I 'd say, for the world's sake —
Though some objected — "Had we seen
The heart and head of each, what screen
Was broken there to give them light,
While in ourselves it shuts the sight,
We should no more admire, perchance,
That these found truth out at a glance,
Than marvel how the bat discerns
Some pitch-dark cavern's fifty turns,
Led by a finer tact, a gift
He boasts, which other birds must shift
Without, and grope as best they can."
No, freely I would praise the man, —
Nor one whit more, if he contended
That gift of his, from God, descended.
Ah, friend, what gift of man's does not?
No nearer something, by a jot,
Rise an infinity of nothings
Than one: take Euclid for your teacher;
Distinguish kinds: do crownings, clothings,
Make that Creator which was creature?
Multiply gifts upon man's head,
And what, when all 's done, shall be said
But — the more gifted he, I ween!

That one 's made Christ, this other, Pilate,
And this might be all that has been, —
So what is there to frown or smile at?
What is left for us, save, in growth
Of soul, to rise up, far past both,
From the gift looking to the Giver,
And from the cistern to the river,
And from the finite to infinity,
And from man's dust to God's divinity?

XVII.

Take all in a word: the truth in God's breast
Lies trace for trace upon ours impressed:
Though He is so bright and we so dim,
We are made in His image to witness Him:
And were no eye in us to tell,
Instructed by no inner sense,
The light of heaven from the dark of hell,
That light would want its evidence, —
Though justice, good, and truth were still
Divine, if, by some demon's will,
Hatred and wrong had been proclaimed
Law through the worlds, and right misnamed.
No mere exposition of morality
Made or in part or in totality,
Should win you to give it worship, therefore:
And, if no better proof you will care for, —
Whom do you count the worst man upon earth?
Be sure, he knows, in his conscience, more
Of what right is, than arrives at birth

In the best man's acts that we bow before:
This last knows better — true, but my fact is,
'T is one thing to know, and another to practise.
And thence I conclude that the real God-function
Is to furnish a motive and injunction
For practising what we know already.
And such an injunction and such a motive
As the God in Christ, do you waive, and "heady,
High-minded," hang your tablet-votive
Outside the fane on a finger-post?
Morality to the uttermost,
Supreme in Christ as we all confess,
Why need we prove would avail no jot
To make Him God, if God He were not?
What is the point where Himself lays stress?
Does the precept run, "Believe in good,
In justice, truth, now understood
For the first time"? — or, "Believe in ME,
Who lived and died, yet essentially
Am Lord of Life"? Whoever can take
The same to his heart and for mere love's sake
Conceive of the love, — that man obtains
A new truth; no conviction gains
Of an old one only, made intense
By a fresh appeal to his faded sense.

XVIII.

"Can it be that He stays inside?
Is the vesture left me to commune with?
Could my soul find aught to sing in tune with

Even at this lecture, if she tried?
Oh, let me at lowest sympathize
With the lurking drop of blood that lies
In the desiccated brain's white roots
Without a throb for Christ's attributes,
As the lecturer makes his special boast!
If love 's dead there, it has left a ghost.
Admire we, how from heart to brain
(Though to say so strike the doctors dumb)
One instinct rises and falls again,
Restoring the equilibrium.
And how when the Critic had done his best,
And the pearl of price, at reason's test,
Lay dust and ashes levigable
On the Professor's lecture-table, —
When we looked for the inference and monition
That our faith, reduced to such a condition,
Be swept forthwith to its natural dust-hole, —
He bids us, when we least expect it,
Take back our faith, — if it be not just whole,
Yet a pearl indeed, as his tests affect it,
Which fact pays damage done rewardingly,
So, prize we our dust and ashes accordingly!
'Go home and venerate the Myth
I thus have experimented with —
This Man, continue to adore Him
Rather than all who went before Him,
And all who ever followed after!' —
Surely for this I may praise you, my brother!
Will you take the praise in tears or laughter?

That 's one point gained: can I compass another?
Unlearned love was safe from spurning —
Can't we respect your loveless learning?
Let us at least give learning honor!
What laurels had we showered upon her,
Girding her loins up to perturb
Our theory of the Middle Verb;
Or Turk-like brandishing a scimitar
O'er anapæsts in comic-trimeter;
Or curing the halt and maimed 'Iketides,'
While we lounged on at our indebted ease:
Instead of which, a tricksy demon
Sets her at Titus or Philemon!
When ignorance wags his ears of leather
And hates God's word, 't is altogether;
Nor leaves he his congenial thistles
To go and browse on Paul's Epistles. —
And you, the audience, who might ravage
The world wide, enviably savage,
Nor heed the cry of the retriever,
More than Herr Heine (before his fever), —
I do not tell a lie so arrant
As say my passion's wings are furled up,
And, without plainest heavenly warrant,
I were ready and glad to give the world up —
But still, when you rub the brow meticulous,
And ponder the profit of turning holy
If not for God's, for your own sake solely, —
God forbid I should find you ridiculous!
Deduce from this lecture all that eases you,

Nay, call yourselves, if the calling pleases you,
'Christians,' — abhor the deist's pravity, —
Go on, you shall no more move my gravity,
Than, when I see boys ride a-cockhorse
I find it in my heart to embarrass them
By hinting that their stick 's a mock horse,
And they really carry what they say carries them."

XIX.

So sat I talking with my mind.
I did not long to leave the door
And find a new church, as before,
But rather was quiet and inclined
To prolong and enjoy the gentle resting
From further tracking and trying and testing.
"This tolerance is a genial mood!"
(Said I, and a little pause ensued).
"One trims the bark 'twixt shoal and shelf,
And sees, each side, the good effects of it,
A value for religion's self,
A carelessness about the sects of it.
Let me enjoy my own conviction,
Not watch my neighbor's faith with fretfulness
Still spying there some dereliction
Of truth, perversity, forgetfulness!
Better a mild indifferentism,
Teaching that all our faiths (though duller
His shine through a dull spirit's prism)
Originally had one color!
Better pursue a pilgrimage

Through ancient and through modern times
To many peoples, various climes,
Where I may see saint, savage, sage,
Fuse their respective creeds in one
Before the general Father's throne!" —

XX.

'T was the horrible storm began afresh!
The black night caught me in his mesh
Whirled me up, and flung me prone.
I was left on the college-step alone.
I looked, and far there, ever fleeting
Far, far away, the receding gesture,
And looming of the lessening vesture! —
Swept forward from my stupid hand,
While I watched my foolish heart expand
In the lazy glow of benevolence,
O'er the various modes of man's belief.
I sprang up with fear's vehemence. —
"Needs must there be one way, our chief
Best way of worship: let me strive
To find it, and when found, contrive
My fellows also take their share!
This constitutes my earthly care:
God's is above it and distinct.
For I, a man, with men am linked,
And not a brute with brutes; no gain
That I experience, must remain
Unshared: but should my best endeavor
To share it, fail — subsisteth ever

God's care above, and I exult
That God, by God's own ways occult,
May — doth, I will believe — bring back
All wanderers to a single track.
Meantime, I can but testify
God's care for me — no more, can I —
It is but for myself I know:
The world rolls witnessing around me
Only to leave me as it found me;
Men cry there, but my ear is slow:
Their races flourish or decay —
What boots it, while yon lucid way
Loaded with stars, divides the vault?
But soon my soul repairs its fault
When, sharpening sense's hebetude,
She turns on my own life! So viewed,
No mere mote's-breadth but teems immense
With witnessings of Providence:
And woe to me if when I look
Upon that record, the sole book
Unsealed to me, I take no heed
Of any warning that I read!
Have I been sure, this Christmas-Eve,
God's own hand did the rainbow weave,
Whereby the truth from heaven slid
Into my soul? — I cannot bid
The world admit He stooped to heal
My soul, as if in a thunder-peal
Where one heard noise, and one saw flame,
I only knew He named my name;

But what is the world to me, for sorrow
Or joy in its censure, when to-morrow
It drops the remark, with just-turned head,
Then, on again, 'That man is dead'?
Yes, but for me — my name called, — drawn
As a conscript's lot from the lap's black yawn,
He has dipt into on a battle-dawn:
Bid out of life by a nod, a glance, —
Stumbling, mute-mazed, at nature's chance, —
With a rapid finger circled round,
Fixed to the first poor inch of ground
To fight from, where his foot was found;
Whose ear but a minute since lay free
To the wide camp's buzz and gossipry —
Summoned, a solitary man,
To end his life where his life began,
From the safe glad rear, to the dreadful van!
Soul of mine, hadst thou caught and held
By the hem of the vesture!" —

XXI.

And I caught
At the flying robe, and unrepelled
Was lapped again in its folds full-fraught
With warmth and wonder and delight,
God's mercy being infinite.
For scarce had the words escaped my tongue,
When, at a passionate bound, I sprung,
Out of the wandering world of rain,
Into the little chapel again.

XXII.

How else was I found there, bolt upright
On my bench, as if I had never left it? —
Never flung out on the common at night
Nor met the storm and wedge-like cleft it,
Seen the raree-show of Peter's successor,
Or the laboratory of the Professor!
For the Vision, that was true, I wist,
True as that heaven and earth exist.
There sat my friend, the yellow and tall,
With his neck and its wen in the selfsame place;
Yet my nearest neighbor's cheek showed gall,
She had slid away a contemptuous space:
And the old fat woman, late so placable,
Eyed me with symptoms, hardly mistakable,
Of her milk of kindness turning rancid.
In short a spectator might have fancied
That I had nodded betrayed by slumber,
Yet kept my seat, a warning ghastly,
Through the heads of the sermon, nine in number,
And woke up now at the tenth and lastly.
But again, could such a disgrace have happened?
Each friend at my elbow had surely nudged it;
And, as for the sermon, where did my nap end?
Unless I heard it, could I have judged it?
Could I report as I do at the close,
First, the preacher speaks through his nose:
Second, his gesture is too emphatic:
Thirdly, to wave what 's pedagogic,
The subject-matter itself lacks logic:

Fourthly, the English is ungrammatic.
Great news! the preacher is found no Pascal,
Whom, if I pleased, I might to the task call
Of making square to a finite eye
The circle of infinity,
And find so all-but-just-succeeding!
Great news! the sermon proves no reading
Where bee-like in the flowers I may bury me,
Like Taylor's, the immortal Jeremy!
And now that I know the very worst of him,
What was it I thought to obtain at first of him
Ha! Is God mocked, as He asks?
Shall I take on me to change His tasks,
And dare, dispatched to a river-head
For a simple draught of the element,
Neglect the thing for which He sent,
And return with another thing instead? —
Saying, "Because the water found
Welling up from underground,
Is mingled with the taints of earth,
While Thou, I know, dost laugh at dearth,
And couldst, at wink or word, convulse
The world with the leap of a river-pulse, —
Therefore I turned from the oozings muddy,
And bring thee a chalice I found, instead:
See the brave veins in the breccia ruddy!
One would suppose that the marble bled.
What matters the water? A hope I have nursed,
The waterless cup will quench my thirst." —
Better have knelt at the poorest stream

That trickles in pain from the straitest rift!
For the less or the more is all God's gift,
Who blocks up or breaks wide the granite-seam.
And here, is there water or not, to drink?
I, then, in ignorance and weakness,
Taking God's help, have attained to think
My heart does best to receive in meekness
That mode of worship, as most to His mind,
Where earthly aids being cast behind,
His All in All appears serene
With the thinnest human veil between,
Letting the mystic lamps, the seven,
The many motions of His spirit,
Pass, as they list, to earth from heaven.
For the preacher's merit or demerit,
It were to be wished the flaws were fewer
In the earthen vessel, holding treasure,
Which lies as safe in a golden ewer;
But the main thing is, does it hold good measure?
Heaven soon sets right all other matters!—
Ask, else, these ruins of humanity,
This flesh worn out to rags and tatters,
This soul at struggle with insanity,
Who thence take comfort, (can I doubt?)
Which an empire gained, were a loss without.
May it be mine! And let us hope
That no worse blessing befall the Pope,
Turn'd sick at last of the day's buffoonery,
Of posturings and petticoatings,

Beside his Bourbon bully's gloatings
In the bloody orgies of drunk poltroonery!
Nor may the Professor forego its peace
At Göttingen, presently, when, in the dusk
Of his life, if his cough, as I fear, should increase
Prophesied of by that horrible husk; —
When thicker and thicker the darkness fills
The world through his misty spectacles,
And he gropes for something more substantial
Than a fable, myth, or personification, —
May Christ do for him, what no mere man shall,
And stand confessed as the God of salvation!
Meantime, in the still recurring fear
Lest myself, at unawares, be found,
While attacking the choice of my neighbors round,
With none of my own made — I choose here!
The giving out of the hymn reclaims me;
I have done: and if any blames me,
Thinking that merely to touch in brevity
The topics I dwell on, were unlawful, —
Or worse, that I trench, with undue levity,
On the bounds of the holy and the awful, —
I praise the heart, and pity the head of him,
And refer myself to THEE, instead of him,
Who head and heart alike discernest,
Looking below light speech we utter
When frothy spume and frequent sputter
Prove that the soul's depths boil in earnest!
May the truth shine out, stand ever before us!

I put up pencil and join chorus
To Hepzibah Tune, without further apology,
The last five verses of the third section
Of the seventeenth hymn of Whitfield's Collection,
To conclude with the doxology.

EASTER-DAY.

I.

How very hard it is to be
A Christian! Hard for you and me, —
Not the mere task of making real
That duty up to its ideal,
Effecting thus, complete and whole,
A purpose of the human soul —
For that is always hard to do;
But hard, I mean, for me and you
To realize it, more or less,
With even the moderate success
Which commonly repays our strife
To carry out the aims of life.
"This aim is greater," you will say,
"And so more arduous every way." —
But the importance of their fruits
Still proves to man, in all pursuits,
Proportional encouragement.
"Then, what if it be God's intent
That labor to this one result
Should seem unduly difficult?"
Ah, that's a question in the dark —
And the sole thing that I remark
Upon the difficulty, this;
We do not see it where it is,
At the beginning of the race:

As we proceed, it shifts its place,
And where we looked for crowns to fall,
We find the tug 's to come, — that 's all.

II.

At first you say, "The whole, or chief
Of difficulties, is belief.
Could I believe once thoroughly,
The rest were simple. What? Am I
An idiot, do you think, — a beast?
Prove to me, only that the least
Command of God is God's indeed,
And what injunction shall I need
To pay obedience? Death so nigh,
When time must end, eternity
Begin, — and cannot I compute,
Weigh loss and gain together, suit
My actions to the balance drawn,
And give my body to be sawn
Asunder, hacked in pieces, tied
To horses, stoned, burned, crucified,
Like any martyr of the list?
How gladly! — if I made acquist,
Through the brief minute's fierce annoy,
Of God's eternity of joy."

III.

And certainly you name the point
Whereon all turns: for could you joint
This flexile finite life once tight

Into the fixed and infinite,
You, safe inside, would spurn what 's out,
With carelessness enough, no doubt —
Would spurn mere life : but when time brings
To their next stage your reasonings,
Your eyes, late wide, begin to wink
Nor see the path so well, I think.

IV.

You say, " Faith may be, one agrees,
A touchstone for God's purposes,
Even as ourselves conceive of them.
Could He acquit us or condemn
For holding what no hand can loose,
Rejecting when we can't but choose ?
As well award the victor's wreath
To whosoever should take breath
Duly each minute while he lived —
Grant heaven, because a man contrived
To see its sunlight every day
He walked forth on the public way.
You must mix some uncertainty
With faith, if you would have faith be.
Why, what but faith, do we abhor
And idolize each other for —
Faith in our evil, or our good,
Which is or is not understood
Aright by those we love or those
We hate, thence called our friends or foes ?
Your mistress saw your spirit's grace,

When, turning from the ugly face,
I found belief in it too hard;
And she and I have our reward. —
Yet here a doubt peeps: well for us
Weak beings, to go using thus
A touchstone for our little ends,
Trying with faith the foes and friends; —
But God, bethink you! I would fain
Conceive of the Creator's reign
As based upon exacter laws
Than creatures build by with applause.
In all God's acts — (as Plato cries
He doth) — He should geometrize.
Whence, I desiderate . . ."

V.

I see!
You would grow as a natural tree,
Stand as a rock, soar up like fire.
The world 's so perfect and entire,
Quite above faith, so right and fit!
Go there, walk up and down in it!
No. The creation travails, groans —
Contrive your music from its moans,
Without or let or hindrance, friend!
That 's an old story, and its end
As old — you come back (be sincere)
With every question you put here
(Here where there once was, and is still,
We think, a living oracle,

Whose answers you stand carping at)
This time flung back unanswered flat, —
Beside, perhaps, as many more
As those that drove you out before,
Now added, where was little need!
Questions impossible, indeed,
To us who sat still, all and each
Persuaded that our earth had speech
Of God's, writ down, no matter if
In cursive type or hieroglyph, —
Which one fact freed us from the yoke
Of guessing why He never spoke.
You come back in no better plight
Than when you left us, — am I right?

VI.

So, the old process, I conclude,
Goes on, the reasoning 's pursued
Further. You own, "'T is well averred,
A scientific faith 's absurd, —
Frustrates the very end 't was meant
To serve. So, I would rest content
With a mere probability,
But, probable; the chance must lie
Clear on one side, — lie all in rough,
So long as there be just enough
To pin my faith to, though it hap
Only at points: from gap to gap
One hangs up a huge curtain so,
Grandly, nor seeks to have it go

Foldless and flat along the wall.
What care I if some interval
Of life less plainly may depend
On God? I 'd hang there to the end;
And thus I should not find it hard
To be a Christian and debarred
From trailing on the earth, till furled
Away by death. — Renounce the world!
Were that a mighty hardship? Plan
A pleasant life, and straight some man
Beside you, with, if he thought fit,
Abundant means to compass it,
Shall turn deliberate aside
To try and live as, if you tried
You clearly might, yet most despise.
One friend of mine wears out his eyes,
Slighting the stupid joys of sense,
In patient hope that, ten years hence,
'Somewhat completer,' he may say,
'My list of *coleoptera!*'
While just the other who most laughs
At him, above all epitaphs
Aspires to have his tomb describe
Himself as sole among the tribe
Of snuffbox-fanciers, who possessed
A Grignon with the Regent's crest.
So that, subduing, as you want,
Whatever stands predominant
Among my earthly appetites
For tastes and smells and sounds and sights,

I shall be doing that alone,
To gain a palm-branch and a throne,
Which fifty people undertake
To do, and gladly, for the sake
Of giving a Semitic guess,
Or playing pawns at blindfold chess."

VII.

Good! and the next thing is, — look round
For evidence enough. 'T is found,
No doubt: as is your sort of mind,
So is your sort of search: you 'll find
What you desire, and that 's to be
A Christian. What says history?
How comforting a point it were
To find some mummy-scrap declare
There lived a Moses! Better still,
Prove Jonah's whale translatable
Into some quicksand of the seas,
Isle, cavern, rock, or what you please,
That faith might clap her wings and crow
From such an eminence! Or, no —
The human heart 's best; you prefer
Making that prove the minister
To truth; you probe its wants and needs,
And hopes and fears, then try what creeds
Meet these most aptly, — resolute
That faith plucks such substantial fruit
Wherever these two correspond,
She little needs to look beyond,

And puzzle out who Orpheus was,
Or Dionysius Zagrias.
You 'll find sufficient, as I say,
To satisfy you either way;
You wanted to believe; your pains
Are crowned — you do: and what remains?
"Renounce the world!" — Ah, were it done
By merely cutting one by one
Your limbs off, with your wise head last,
How easy were it! — how soon past,
If once in the believing mood!
"Such is man's usual gratitude,
Such thanks to God do we return,
For not exacting that we spurn
A single gift of life, forego
One real gain, — only taste them so
With gravity and temperance,
That those mild virtues may enhance
Such pleasures, rather than abstract —
Last spice of which, will be the fact
Of love discerned in every gift;
While, when the scene of life shall shift,
And the gay heart be taught to ache,
As sorrows and privations take
The place of joy, — the thing that seems
Mere misery, under human schemes,
Becomes, regarded by the light
Of love, as very near, or quite
As good a gift as joy before.
So plain is it that, all the more

God's dispensation 's merciful,
More pettishly we try and cull
Briers, thistles, from our private plot,
To mar God's ground where thorns are not!"

VIII.

Do you say this, or I? — Oh, you!
Then, what, my friend? — (thus I pursue
Our parley) — you indeed opine
That the Eternal and Divine
Did, eighteen centuries ago,
In very truth . . . Enough! you know
The all-stupendous tale, — that Birth,
That Life, that Death! And all, the earth
Shuddered at, — all, the heavens grew black
Rather than see; all, nature's rack
And throe at dissolution's brink
Attested, — all took place, you think,
Only to give our joys a zest,
And prove our sorrows for the best?
We differ, then! Were I, still pale
And heartstruck at the dreadful tale,
Waiting to hear God's voice declare
What horror followed for my share,
As implicated in the deed,
Apart from other sins, — concede
That if He blacked out in a blot
My brief life's pleasantness, 't were not
So very disproportionate!
Or there might be another fate —

I certainly could understand
(If fancies were the thing in hand)
How God might save, at that day's price,
The impure in their impurities,
Give formal license and complete
To choose the fair and pick the sweet.
But there be certain words, broad, plain,
Uttered again and yet again,
Hard to mistake, or overgloss —
Announcing this world's gain for loss,
And bidding us reject the same:
The whole world lieth (they proclaim)
In wickedness, — come out of it!
Turn a deaf ear, if you think fit,
But I who thrill through every nerve
At thought of what deaf ears deserve, —
How do you counsel in the case?

IX.

"I 'd take, by all means, in your place,
The safe side, since it so appears:
Deny myself, a few brief years,
The natural pleasure, leave the fruit
Or cut the plant up by the root.
Remember what a martyr said
On the rude tablet overhead!
'I was born sickly, poor and mean,
A slave: no misery could screen
The holders of the pearl of price
From Cæsar's envy; therefore twice

I fought with beasts, and three times saw
My children suffer by his law;
At last my own release was earned:
I was some time in being burned,
But at the close a Hand came through
The fire above my head, and drew
My soul to Christ, whom now I see.
Sergius, a brother, writes for me
This testimony on the wall —
For me, I have forgot it all.'
You say right; this were not so hard!
And since one nowise is debarred
From this, why not escape some sins
By such a method?"

X.

Then begins
To the old point, revulsion new —
(For 't is just this, I bring you to)
If after all we should mistake,
And so renounce life for the sake
Of death and nothing else? You hear
Our friends we jeered at, send the jeer
Back to ourselves with good effect —
"There were my beetles to collect!"
"My box — a trifle, I confess,
But here I hold it, ne'ertheless!"
Poor idiots, (let us pluck up heart
And answer) we, the better part
Have chosen, though 't were only hope, —

Nor envy moles like you that grope
Amid your veritable muck,
More than the grasshoppers would truck,
For yours, their passionate life away,
That spends itself in leaps all day
To reach the sun, you want the eyes
To see, as they the wings to rise
And match the noble hearts of them!
Thus the contemner we contemn, —
And, when doubt strikes us, thus we ward
Its stroke off, caught upon our guard, —
Not struck enough to overturn
Our faith, but shake it — make us learn
What I began with, and, I wis,
End, having proved, — how hard it is
To be a Christian!

XI.

"Proved, or not,
Howe'er you wis, small thanks, I wot,
You get of mine, for taking pains
To make it hard to me. Who gains
By that, I wonder? Here I live
In trusting ease; and here you drive
At causing me to lose what most
Yourself would mourn for, had you lost!"

XII.

But, do you see, my friend, that thus
You leave St. Paul for Æschylus? —

Who made his Titan's arch-device
The giving men *blind hopes* to spice
The meal of life with, else devoured
In bitter haste, while lo, death loured
Before them at the platter's edge!
If faith should be, as I allege,
Quite other than a condiment
To heighten flavors with, or meant
(Like that brave curry of his Grace)
To take at need the victuals' place?
If, having dined, you would digest
Besides, and turning to your rest
Should find instead . . .

XIII.

Now, you shall see
And judge if a mere foppery
Pricks on my speaking! I resolve
To utter . . yes, it shall devolve
On you to hear as solemn, strange,
And dread a thing as in the range
Of facts, — or fancies, if God will —
E'er happened to our kind! I still
Stand in the cloud, and while it wraps
My face, ought not to speak, perhaps;
Seeing that if I carry through
My purpose, if my words in you
Find a live actual listener,
My story, reason must aver
False after all — the happy chance!

While, if each human countenance
I meet in London day by day,
Be what I fear, — my warnings fray
No one, and no one they convert,
And no one helps me to assert
How hard it is to really be
A Christian, and in vacancy
I pour this story!

XIV.

I commence
By trying to inform you, whence
It comes that every Easter-night
As now, I sit up, watch, till light,
Upon those chimney-stacks and roofs,
Give through my window-pane, gray proofs
That Easter-day is breaking slow.
On such a night three years ago,
It chanced that I had cause to cross
The common, where the chapel was,
Our friend spoke of, the other day —
You 've not forgotten, I dare say.
I fell to musing of the time
So close, the blessed matin-prime
All hearts leap up at, in some guise —
One could not well do otherwise.
Insensibly my thoughts were bent
Toward the main point; I overwent
Much the same ground of reasoning
As you and I just now. One thing

Remained, however — one that tasked
My soul to answer; and I asked,
Fairly and frankly, what might be
That History, that Faith, to me —
Me there — not me in some domain
Built up and peopled by my brain,
Weighing its merits as one weighs
Mere theories for blame or praise, —
The kingcraft of the Lucumons,
Or Fourier's scheme, its pros and cons, —
But my faith there, or none at all.
"How were my case, now, did I fall
Dead here. this minute — should I lie
Faithful or faithless?" — Note that I
Inclined thus ever! — little prone
For instance, when I lay alone
In childhood, to go calm to sleep
And leave a closet where might keep
His watch perdue some murderer
Waiting till twelve o'clock to stir,
As good authentic legends tell:
"He might: but how improbable!
How little likely to deserve
The pains and trial to the nerve
Of thrusting head into the dark!" —
Urged my old nurse, and bade me mark
Beside, that, should the dreadful scout
Really lie hid there, and leap out
At first turn of the rusty key,
Mine were small gain that she could see,

Killed not in bed but on the floor,
And losing one night's sleep the more.
I tell you, I would always burst
The door ope, know my fate at first.
This time, indeed, the closet penned
No such assassin: but a friend
Rather, peeped out to guard me, fit
For counsel, Common Sense, to wit,
Who said a good deal that might pass, —
Heartening, impartial too, it was,
Judge else: "For, soberly now, — who
Should be a Christian if not you?"
(Hear how he smoothed me down.) "One takes
A whole life, sees what course it makes
Mainly, and not by fits and starts —
In spite of stoppage which imparts
Fresh value to the general speed.
A life, with none, would fly indeed:
Your progressing is slower — right!
We deal with progress and not flight.
Through baffling senses passionate,
Fancies as restless, — with a freight
Of knowledge cumbersome enough
To sink your ship when waves grow rough,
Though meant for ballast in the hold, —
I find, 'mid dangers manifold,
The good bark answers to the helm
Where faith sits, easier to o'erwhelm
Than some stout peasant's heavenly guid
Whose hard head could not, if it tried,

Conceive a doubt, nor understand
How senses hornier than his hand
Should tice the Christian off his guard.
More happy! But shall we award
Less honor to the hull which, dogged
By storms, a mere wreck, waterlogged,
Masts by the board, her bulwarks gone,
And stanchions going, yet bears on, —
Than to mere life-boats, built to save,
And triumph o'er the breaking wave?
Make perfect your good ship as these,
And what were her performances!"
I added — "Would the ship reach home!
I wish indeed 'God's kingdom come —'
The day when I shall see appear
His bidding, as my duty, clear
From doubt! And it shall dawn, that day,
Some future season; Easter may
Prove, not impossibly, the time —
Yes, that were striking — fates would chime
So aptly! Easter-morn, to bring
The Judgment! — deeper in the spring
Than now, however, when there 's snow
Capping the hills; for earth must show
All signs of meaning to pursue
Her tasks as she was wont to do —
The skylark, taken by surprise
As we ourselves, shall recognize
Sudden the end. For suddenly
It comes; the dreadfulness must be

In that; all warrants the belief —
'At night it cometh like a thief.'
I fancy why the trumpet blows; —
Plainly, to wake one. From repose
We shall start up, at last awake
From life, that insane dream we take
For waking now, because it seems.
And as, when now we wake from dreams,
We laugh, while we recall them, 'Fool,
To let the chance slip, linger cool
When such adventure offered! Just
A bridge to cross, a dwarf to thrust
Aside, a wicked mage to stab —
And, lo ye, I had kissed Queen Mab!' —
So shall we marvel why we grudged
Our labor here, and idly judged
Of heaven, we might have gained, but lose!
Lose? Talk of loss, and I refuse
To plead at all! You speak no worse
Nor better than my ancient nurse
When she would tell me in my youth
I well deserved that shapes uncouth
Frighted and teased me in my sleep:
Why could I not in memory keep
Her precept for the evil's cure?
'Pinch your own arm, boy, and be sure
You 'll wake forthwith!' "

XV.

And as I said
This nonsense, throwing back my head
With light complacent laugh, I found
Suddenly all the midnight round
One fire. The dome of heaven had stood
As made up of a multitude
Of handbreadth cloudlets, one vast rack
Of ripples infinite and black,
From sky to sky. Sudden there went,
Like horror and astonishment,
A fierce vindictive scribble of red
Quick flame across, as if one said
(The angry scribe of Judgment) "There —
Burn it!" And straight I was aware
That the whole ribwork round, minute
Cloud touching cloud beyond compute,
Was tinted, each with its own spot
Of burning at the core, till clot
Jammed against clot, and spilt its fire
Over all heaven, which 'gan suspire
As fanned to measure equable, —
Just so great conflagrations kill
Night overhead, and rise and sink,
Reflected. Now the fire would shrink
And wither off the blasted face
Of heaven, and I distinct might trace
The sharp black ridgy outlines left
Unburned like network — then, each cleft
The fire had been sucked back into,

Regorged, and out it surging flew
Furiously, and night writhed inflamed,
Till, tolerating to be tamed
No longer, certain rays world-wide
Shot downwardly. On every side
Caught past escape, the earth was lit;
As if a dragon's nostril split
And all his famished ire o'erflowed;
Then, as he winced at his lord's goad,
Back he inhaled: whereat I found
The clouds into vast pillars bound,
Based on the corners of the earth,
Propping the skies at top: a dearth
Of fire i' the violet intervals,
Leaving exposed the utmost walls
Of time, about to tumble in
And end the world.

XVI.

I felt begin
The Judgment-Day: to retrocede
Was too late now. "In very deed,"
(I uttered to myself) "that Day!"
The intuition burned away
All darkness from my spirit too:
There stood I, found and fixed, I knew,
Choosing the world. The choice was made;
And naked and disguiseless stayed,
And unevadable, the fact.
My brain held ne'ertheless compact

Its senses, nor my heart declined
Its office; rather, both combined
To help me in this juncture. I
Lost not a second, — agony
Gave boldness: since my life had end
And my choice with it — best defend,
Applaud both! I resolved to say,
"So was I framed by Thee, such way
I put to use Thy senses here!
It was so beautiful, so near,
Thy world, — what could I then but choose
My part there? Nor did I refuse
To look above the transient boon
Of time; but it was hard so soon
As in a short life, to give up
Such beauty: I could put the cup
Undrained of half its fulness, by;
But, to renounce it utterly, —
That was too hard! Nor did the cry
Which bade renounce it, touch my brain
Authentically deep and plain
Enough to make my lips let go.
But Thou, who knowest all, dost know
Whether I was not, life's brief while,
Endeavoring to reconcile
Those lips (too tardily, alas!)
To letting the dear remnant pass,
One day, — some drops of earthly good
Untasted! Is it for this mood,
That Thou, whose earth delights so well,
Hast made its complement a hell?"

XVII.

A final belch of fire like blood,
Overbroke all heaven in one flood
Of doom. Then fire was sky, and sky
Fire, and both, one brief ecstasy,
Then ashes. But I heard no noise
(Whatever was) because a Voice
Beside me spoke thus, "Life is done,
Time ends, Eternity 's begun,
And thou art judged for evermore."

XVIII.

I looked up; all seemed as before;
Of that cloud-Tophet overhead,
No trace was left: I saw instead
The common round me, and the sky
Above, stretched drear and emptily
Of life. 'T was the last watch of night,
Except what brings the morning quite;
When the armed angel, conscience-clear,
His task nigh done, leans o'er his spear
And gazes on the earth he guards,
Safe one night more through all its wards,
Till God relieve him at his post.
"A dream — a waking dream at most!"
(I spoke out quick, that I might shake
The horrid nightmare off, and wake.)
"The world gone, yet the world is here?
Are not all things as they appear?
Is Judgment past for me alone? —

And where had place the great white throne?
The rising of the quick and dead?
Where stood they, small and great? Who read
The sentence from the opened book?"
So, by degrees, the blood forsook
My heart, and let it beat afresh;
I knew I should break through the mesh
Of horror, and breathe presently:
When, lo, again, the Voice by me!

XIX.

I saw . . . Oh, brother, 'mid far sands
The palm-tree-cinctured city stands,
Bright-white beneath, as heaven, bright-blue,
Leans o'er it, while the years pursue
Their course, unable to abate
Its paradisal laugh at fate!
One morn, — the Arab staggers blind
O'er a new tract of death, calcined
To ashes, silence, nothingness, —
And strives, with dizzy wits, to guess
Whence fell the blow. What if, 'twixt skies
And prostrate earth, he should surprise
The imaged vapor, head to foot,
Surveying, motionless and mute,
Its work, ere, in a whirlwind rapt,
It vanish up again? — So hapt
My chance. He stood there. Like the smoke
Pillared o'er Sodom, when day broke, —
I saw Him. One magnific pall

Mantled in massive fold and fall
His dread, and coiled in snaky swathes
About His feet: night's black, that bathes
All else, broke, grizzled with despair,
Against the soul of blackness there.
A gesture told the mood within —
That wrapped right hand which based the chin,
That intense meditation fixed
On His procedure, — pity mixed
With the fulfilment of decree.
Motionless, thus, He spoke to me,
Who fell before His feet, a mass,
No man now.

XX.

"All is come to pass.
Such shows are over for each soul
They had respect to. In the roll
Of Judgment which convinced mankind
Of sin, stood many, bold and blind,
Terror must burn the truth into:
Their fate for them! — thou hadst to do
With absolute omnipotence,
Able its judgments to dispense
To the whole race, as every one
Were its sole object. Judgment done,
God is, thou art, — the rest is hurled
To nothingness for thee. This world,
This finite life, thou hast preferred,
In disbelief of God's own word,
To heaven and to infinity.

Here the probation was for thee,
To show thy soul the earthly mixed
With heavenly, it must choose betwixt.
The earthly joys lay palpable, —
A taint in each, distinct as well;
The heavenly flitted, faint and rare,
Above them, but as truly were
Taintless, so, in their nature, best.
Thy choice was earth: thou didst attest
'T was fitter spirit should subserve
The flesh, than flesh refine to nerve
Beneath the spirit's play. Advance
No claim to their inheritance
Who chose the spirit's fugitive
Brief gleams, and yearned, 'This were to live
Indeed, if rays, completely pure
From flesh that dulls them, could endure, —
Not shoot in meteor-light athwart
Our earth, to show how cold and swart
It lies beneath their fire, but stand
As stars do, destined to expand,
Prove veritable worlds, our home!'
Thou saidst, — 'Let spirit star the dome
Of sky, that flesh may miss no peak,
No nook of earth, — I shall not seek
Its service further!' Thou art shut
Out of the heaven of spirit; glut
Thy sense upon the world: 't is thine
For ever — take it!"

XXI.

"How? Is mine,
The world?" (I cried, while my soul broke
Out in a transport,) "Hast thou spoke
Plainly in that? Earth's exquisite
Treasures of wonder and delight,
For me?"

XXII.

The austere Voice returned, —
"So soon made happy? Hadst thou learned
What God accounteth happiness,
Thou wouldst not find it hard to guess
What hell may be His punishment
For those who doubt if God invent
Better than they. Let such men rest
Content with what they judged the best.
Let the unjust usurp at will:
The filthy shall be filthy still:
Miser, there waits the gold for thee!
Hater, indulge thine enmity!
And thou, whose heaven self-ordained
Was, to enjoy earth unrestrained,
Do it! Take all the ancient show!
The woods shall wave, the rivers flow,
And men apparently pursue
Their works, as they were wont to do,
While living in probation yet.
I promise not thou shalt forget
The past, now gone to its account;
But leave thee with the old amount

Of faculties, nor less nor more,
Unvisited, as heretofore,
By God's free spirit, that makes an end.
So, once more, take thy world! expend
Eternity upon its shows,
Flung thee as freely as one rose
Out of a summer's opulence,
Over the Eden-barrier whence
Thou art excluded. Knock in vain!"

XXIII.

I sat up. All was still again.
I breathed free: to my heart, back fled
The warmth. "But, all the world!" — I said.
I stooped and picked a leaf of fern,
And recollected I might learn
From books, how many myriad sorts
Of fern exist, to trust reports,
Each as distinct and beautiful
As this, the very first I cull.
Think, from the first leaf to the last!
Conceive, then, earth's resources! Vast
Exhaustless beauty, endless change
Of wonder! and this foot shall range
Alps, Andes, — and this eye devour
The bee-bird and the aloe-flower?

XXIV.

Then the Voice, "Welcome so to rate
The arras-folds that variegate

The earth, God's antechamber, well!
The wise, who waited there, could tell
By these, what royalties in store
Lay one step past the entrance-door.
For whom was reckoned not too much
This life's munificence? For such
As thou, — a race, whereof scarce one
Was able, in a million,
To feel that any marvel lay
In objects round his feet all day;
Scarce one, in many millions more,
Willing, if able, to explore
The secreter, minuter charm! —
Brave souls, a fern-leaf could disarm
Of power to cope with God's intent, —
Or scared if the south firmament
With north-fire did its wings refledge!
All partial beauty was a pledge
Of beauty in its plenitude:
But since the pledge sufficed thy mood,
Retain it! plenitude be theirs
Who looked above!"

XXV.

Though sharp despairs
Shot through me, I held up, bore on.
"What matter though my trust were gone
From natural things? Henceforth my part
Be less with nature than with art!
For art supplants, gives mainly worth
To nature; 't is man stamps the earth —

And I will seek his impress, seek
The statuary of the Greek,
Italy's painting — there my choice
Shall fix!"

XXVI.

"Obtain it!" said the Voice. —
"The one form with its single act,
Which sculptors labored to abstract,
The one face, painters tried to draw,
With its one look, from throngs they saw.
And that perfection in their soul,
These only hinted at? The whole,
They were but parts of? What each laid
His claim to glory on? — afraid
His fellow-men should give him rank
By the poor tentatives he shrank
Smitten at heart from, all the more,
That gazers pressed in to adore!
'Shall I be judged by only these?'
If such his soul's capacities,
Even while he trod the earth, — think, now
What pomp in Buonarroti's brow,
With its new palace-brain where dwells
Superb the soul, unvexed by cells
That crumbled with the transient clay!
What visions will his right hand's sway
Still turn to form, as still they burst
Upon him? How will he quench thirst,
Titanically infantine,
Laid at the breast of the Divine?

Does it confound thee, — this first page
Emblazoning man's heritage? —
Can this alone absorb thy sight,
As pages were not infinite, —
Like the omnipotence which tasks
Itself, to furnish all that asks
The soul it means to satiate?
What was the world, the starry state
Of the broad skies, — what, all displays
Of power and beauty intermixed,
Which now thy soul is chained betwixt, —
What else than needful furniture
For life's first stage? God's work, be sure,
No more spreads wasted, than falls scant:
He filled, did not exceed, man's want
Of beauty in this life. But through
Life pierce, — and what has earth to do,
Its utmost beauty's appanage,
With the requirement of next stage?
Did God pronounce earth 'very good'?
Needs must it be, while understood
For man's preparatory state;
Nothing to heighten nor abate:
Transfer the same completeness here
To serve a new state's use, — and drear
Deficiency gapes every side!
The good, tried once, were bad, retried.
See the enwrapping rocky niche,
Sufficient for the sleep, in which
The lizard breathes for ages safe:

Split the mould — and as this would chafe
The creature's new world-widened sense,
One minute after day dispense
The thousand sounds and sights that broke
In on him at the chisel's stroke, —
So, in God's eye, the earth's first stuff
Was, neither more nor less, enough
To house man's soul, man's need fulfil.
Man reckoned it immeasurable?
So thinks the lizard of his vault!
Could God be taken in default,
Short of contrivances, by you, —
Or reached, ere ready to pursue
His progress through eternity?
That chambered rock, the lizard's world,
Your easy mallet's blow has hurled
To nothingness forever; so
Has God abolished at a blow
This world, wherein his saints were pent, —
Who, though found grateful and content,
With the provision there, as thou,
Yet knew He would not disallow
Their spirit's hunger, felt as well, —
Unsated, — not unsatable,
As Paradise gives proof. Deride
Their choice now, thou who sit'st outside!"

XXVII.

I cried in anguish, "Mind, the mind,
So miserably cast behind,

To gain what had been wisely lost!
O, let me strive to make the most
Of the poor stinted soul, I nipped
Of budding wings, else now equipped
For voyage from summer isle to isle!
And though she needs must reconcile
Ambition to the life on ground,
Still, I can profit by late found
But precious knowledge. Mind is best —
I will seize mind, forego the rest,
And try how far my tethered strength
May crawl in this poor breadth and length.
Let me, since I can fly no more,
As least spin dervish-like about
(Till giddy rapture almost doubt
I fly) through circling sciences,
Philosophies and histories!
Should the whirl slacken there, then verse,
Fining to music, shall asperse
Fresh and fresh fire-dew, till I strain
Intoxicate, half-break my chain!
Not joyless, though more favored feet
Stand calm, where I want wings to beat
The floor. At least earth's bond is broke!"

XXVIII.

Then, (sickening even while I spoke)
"Let me alone! No answer, pray,
To this! I know what Thou wilt say!
All still is earth's, — to know, as much

As feel its truths, which if we touch
With sense, or apprehend in soul,
What matter? I have reached the goal —
'Whereto does knowledge serve?' will burn
My eyes, too sure, at every turn!
I cannot look back now, nor stake
Bliss on the race, for running's sake.
The goal's a ruin like the rest!" —
"And so much worse thy latter quest,"
(Added the Voice) "that even on earth —
Whenever, in man's soul, had birth
Those intuitions, grasps of guess,
That pull the more into the less,
Making the finite comprehend
Infinity, — the bard would spend
Such praise alone, upon his craft,
As, when wind-lyres obey the waft,
Goes to the craftsman who arranged
The seven strings, changed them and rechanged —
Knowing it was the South that harped.
He felt his song, in singing, warped;
Distinguished his and God's part: whence
A world of spirit as of sense
Was plain to him, yet not too plain,
Which he could traverse, not remain
A guest in: — else were permanent
Heaven on earth, which its gleams were meant
To sting with hunger for full light, —
Made visible in verse, despite
The veiling weakness, — truth by means

Of fable, showing while it screens, —
Since highest truth, man e'er supplied,
Was ever fable on outside.
Such gleams made bright the earth an age;
Now, the whole sun 's his heritage!
Take up thy world, it is allowed,
Thou who hast entered in the cloud!"

XXIX.

Then I — "Behold, my spirit bleeds,
Catches no more at broken reeds, —
But lilies flower those reeds above:
I let the world go, and take love!
Love survives in me, albeit those
I love be henceforth masks and shows,
Not loving men and women: still
I mind how love repaired all ill,
Cured wrong, soothed grief, made earth amends
With parents, brothers, children, friends!
Some semblance of a woman yet
With eyes to help me to forget,
Shall live with me; and I will match
Departed love with love, attach
Its fragments to my whole, nor scorn
The poorest of the grains of corn
I save from shipwreck on this isle,
Trusting its barrenness may smile
With happy foodful green one day,
More precious for the pains. I pray
For love, then, only!"

XXX.

At the word,
The Form, I looked to have been stirred
With pity and approval, rose
O'er me, as when the headsman throws
Axe over shoulder to make end —
I fell prone, letting Him expend
His wrath, while, thus, the inflicting Voice
Smote me. "Is this thy final choice?
Love is the best? 'T is somewhat late!
And all thou dost enumerate
Of power and beauty in the world,
The mightiness of love was curled
Inextricably round about.
Love lay within it and without,
To clasp thee, — but in vain! Thy soul
Still shrunk from Him who made the whole,
Still set deliberate aside
His love! — Now take love! Well betide
Thy tardy conscience! Haste to take
The show of love for the name's sake,
Remembering every moment Who
Beside creating thee unto
These ends, and these for thee, was said
To undergo death in thy stead
In flesh like thine: so ran the tale.
What doubt in thee could countervail
Belief in it? Upon the ground
That in the story had been found
Too much love! How could God love so?

He who in all His works below
Adapted to the needs of man,
Made love the basis of the plan, —
Did love, as was demonstrated:
While man, who was so fit instead
To hate, as every day gave proof, —
Man thought man, for his kind's behoof,
Both could and did invent that scheme
Of perfect love: 't would well beseem
Cain's nature thou wast wont to praise,
Not tally with God's usual ways!"

XXXI.

And I cowered deprecatingly —
"Thou Love of God! Or let me die,
Or grant what shall seem heaven almost!
Let me not know that all is lost,
Though lost it be — leave me not tied
To this despair, this corpse-like bride!
Let that old life seem mine — no more —
With limitation as before,
With darkness, hunger, toil, distress:
Be all the earth a wilderness!
Only let me go on, go on,
Still hoping ever and anon
To reach one eve the Better Land!"

XXXII.

Then did the Form expand, expand —
I knew Him through the dread disguise,

As the whole God within His eyes
Embraced me.

XXXIII.

When I lived again,
The day was breaking, — the gray plain
I rose from, silvered thick with dew.
Was this a vision? False or true?
Since then, three varied years are spent,
And commonly my mind is bent
To think it was a dream — be sure
A mere dream and distemperature —
The last day's watching: then the night, —
The shock of that strange Northern Light
Set my head swimming, bred in me
A dream. And so I live, you see,
Go through the world, try, prove, reject,
Prefer, still struggling to effect
My warfare; happy that I can
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
Not left in God's contempt apart,
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.
Thank God, she still each method tries
To catch me, who may yet escape,
She knows, the fiend in angel's shape!
Thank God, no paradise stands barred
To entry, and I find it hard
To be a Christian, as I said!
Still every now and then my head
Raised glad, sinks mournful — all grows drear

Spite of the sunshine, while I fear
And think, "How dreadful to be grudged
No ease henceforth, as one that 's judged,
Condemned to earth for ever, shut
From heaven!"
But Easter-Day breaks! But
Christ rises! Mercy every way
Is infinite, — and who can say?

SAUL.

I.

Said Abner, "At last thou art come! Ere I tell, ere thou speak,
Kiss my cheek, wish me well!" Then I wished it, and did kiss his cheek.
And he, "Since the King, O my friend, for thy countenance sent,
Neither drunken nor eaten have we; nor until from his tent
Thou return with the joyful assurance the King liveth yet,
Shall our lip with the honey be bright, with the water be wet.
For out of the black mid-tent's silence, a space of three days,
Not a sound hath escaped to thy servants, of prayer nor of praise,
To betoken that Saul and the Spirit have ended their strife,
And that, faint in his triumph, the monarch sinks back upon life.

II.

Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved! God's child, with his dew
On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies still living and blue

Just broken to twine round thy harp-strings, as if no wild heat
Were now raging to torture the desert!"

III.

Then I, as was meet,
Knelt down to the God of my fathers, and rose on my feet,
And ran o'er the sand, burnt to powder. The tent was unlooped;
I pulled up the spear that obstructed, and under I stooped;
Hands and knees on the slippery grass-patch, all withered and gone,
That extends to the second inclosure, I groped my way on
Till I felt where the foldskirts fly open. Then once more I prayed,
And opened the foldskirts and entered, and was not afraid,
But spoke, "Here is David, thy servant!" And no voice replied.
At the first I saw naught but the blackness; but soon I descried
A something more black than the blackness — the vast, the upright
Main prop which sustains the pavilion: and slow into sight
Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest of all; —
Then a sunbeam, that burst through the tent-roof, showed Saul.

IV.

He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms
stretched out wide
On the great cross-support in the centre, that goes
to each side;
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as, caught
in his pangs
And waiting his change, the king-serpent all heavily
hangs,
Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance
come
With the spring-time, — so agonized Saul, drear and
stark, blind and dumb.

V.

Then I tuned my harp, — took off the lilies we twine
round its chords
Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noontide —
those sunbeams like swords!
And I first played the tune all our sheep know, as,
one after one,
So docile they come to the pen-door till folding be
done.
They are white and untorn by the bushes, for lo,
they have fed
Where the long grasses stifle the water within the
stream's bed;
And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star
follows star
Into eve and the blue, far above us, — so blue and
so far! —

VI.

Then the tune, for which quails on the cornland will
each leave his mate
To fly after the player; then, what makes the crickets
elate,
Till for boldness they fight one another: and then,
what has weight
To set the quick jerboa a-musing outside his sand
house —
There are none such as he for a wonder, half bird
and half mouse!
God made all the creatures and gave them our love
and our fear,
To give sign, we and they are his children, one
family here.

VII.

Then I played the help-tune of our reapers, their
wine-song, when hand
Grasps at hand, eye lights eye in good friendship,
and great hearts expand
And grow one in the sense of this world's life. —
And then, the last song
When the dead man is praised on his journey —
"Bear, bear him along
With his few faults shut up like dead flowerets! are
balm-seeds not here
To console us? The land has none left, such as he
on the bier.
Oh, would we might keep thee, my brother!" —
And then, the glad chant

Of the marriage, — first go the young maidens, next, she whom we vaunt
As the beauty, the pride of our dwelling. — And then, the great march
Wherein man runs to man to assist him and buttress an arch
Naught can break; who shall harm them, our friends? —
Then, the chorus intoned
As the Levites go up to the altar in glory enthroned . .
But I stopped here: for here in the darkness, Saul groaned.

VIII.

And I paused, held my breath in such silence, and listened apart;
And the tent shook, for mighty Saul shuddered: and sparkles 'gan dart
From the jewels that woke in his turban at once with a start —
All its lordly male-sapphires, and rubies courageous at heart.
So the head: but the body still moved not, still hung there erect.
And I bent once again to my playing, pursued it unchecked,
As I sang, —

IX.

"Oh, our manhood's prime vigor! No spirit feels waste,
Not a muscle is stopped in its playing, nor sinew unbraced.

Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock
up to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree,
the cool silver shock
Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt
of the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion is couched
in his lair.
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with
gold dust divine,
And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full
draught of wine,
And the sleep in the dried river-channel where
bulrushes tell
That the water was wont to go warbling so softly
and well.
How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit
to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses, for ever
in joy!
Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father,
whose sword thou didst guard
When he trusted thee forth with the armies, for
glorious reward?
Didst thou see the thin hands of thy mother, held
up as men sung
The low song of the nearly-departed, and heard her
faint tongue
Joining in while it could to the witness, 'Let one
more attest,

I have lived, seen God's hand through a lifetime,
and all was for best!'
Then they sung through their tears in strong
triumph, not much, but the rest.
And thy brothers, the help and the contest, the
working whence grew
Such result as, from seething grape-bundles, the
spirit strained true:
And the friends of thy boyhood — that boyhood of
wonder and hope,
Present promise, and wealth of the future beyond
the eye's scope, —
Till lo, thou art grown to a monarch; a people is
thine;
And all gifts which the world offers singly, on one
head combine!
On one head, all the beauty and strength, love, and
rage (like the throe
That, a-work in the rock, helps its labor, and lets
the gold go),
High ambition and deeds which surpass it, fame
crowning them, — all
Brought to blaze on the head of one creature —
King Saul!"

X.

And lo, with that leap of my spirit, — heart, hand,
harp, and voice,
Each lifting Saul's name out of sorrow, each bid-
ding rejoice
Saul's fame in the light it was made for — as when,
dare I say,

The Lord's army in rapture of service, strains
through its array,
And upsoareth the cherubim-chariot — "Saul!"
cried I, and stopped,
And waited the thing that should follow. Then
Saul, who hung propped
By the tent's cross-support in the centre, was struck
by his name.
Have ye seen when Spring's arrowy summons goes
right to the aim,
And some mountain, the last to withstand her, that
held, (he alone,
While the vale laughed in freedom and flowers) on
a broad bust of stone
A year's snow bound about for a breastplate, —
leaves grasp of the sheet?
Fold on fold all at once it crowds thunderously
down to his feet,
And there fronts you, stark, black, but alive yet,
your mountain of old,
With his rents, the successive bequeathings of ages
untold —
Yea, each harm got in fighting your battles, each
furrow and scar
Of his head thrust 'twixt you and the tempest —
all hail, there they are! —
Now again to be softened with verdure, again hold
the nest
Of the dove, tempt the goat and its young to the
green on his crest

For their food in the ardors of summer! One long
shudder thrilled
All the tent till the very air tingled, then sank and
was stilled,
At the King's self left standing before me, released
and aware.
What was gone, what remained? all to traverse
'twixt hope and despair,
Death was past, life not come: so he waited.
Awhile his right hand
Held the brow, helped the eyes left too vacant forth-
with to remand
To their place what new objects should enter: 't was
Saul as before.
I looked up and dared gaze at those eyes, nor was
hurt any more
Than by slow pallid sunsets in autumn, ye watch
from the shore
At their sad level gaze o'er the ocean — a sun's slow
decline
Over hills which, resolved in stern silence, o'erlap
and entwine
Base with base to knit strength more intensely: so,
arm folded arm
O'er the chest whose slow heavings subsided.

XI.

What spell or what charm,
(For, awhile there was trouble within me) what next
should I urge

To sustain him where song had restored him? —
Song filled to the verge
His cup with the wine of this life, pressing all that
it yields
Of mere fruitage, the strength and the beauty: be-
yond, on what fields,
Glean a vintage more potent and perfect to brighten
the eye
And bring blood to the lip, and commend them the
cup they put by?
He saith, "It is good;" still he drinks not: he lets
me praise life,
Gives assent, yet would die for his own part.

XII.

Then fancies grew rife
Which had come long ago on the pasture, when
round me the sheep
Fed in silence — above, the one eagle wheeled slow
as in sleep,
And I lay in my hollow, and mused on the world
that might lie
'Neath his ken, though I saw but the strip 'twixt
the hill and the sky:
And I laughed — "Since my days are ordained to
be passed with my flocks,
Let me people at least with my fancies, the plains
and the rocks,
Dream the life I am never to mix with, and image
the show

Of mankind as they live in those fashions I hardly
shall know!
Schemes of life, its best rules and right uses, the
courage that gains,
And the prudence that keeps what men strive for."
And now these old trains
Of vague thought came again; I grew surer; so,
once more the string
Of my harp made response to my spirit, as thus—

XIII.

"Yea, my king,"
I began—"thou dost well in rejecting mere com-
forts that spring
From the mere mortal life held in common by man
and by brute:
In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul
it bears fruit.
Thou hast marked the slow rise of the tree,—how
its stem trembled first
Till it passed the kid's lip, the stag's antler; then
safely outburst
The fan-branches all round; and thou mindest when
these too, in turn
Broke a-bloom and the palm-tree seemed perfect;
yet more was to learn,
E'en the good that comes in with the palm-fruit.
Our dates shall we slight,
When their juice brings a cure for all sorrow? or
care for the plight

Of the palm's self whose slow growth produced them? Not so! stem and branch
Shall decay, nor be known in their place, while the palm-wine shall stanch
Every wound of man's spirit in winter. I pour thee such wine.
Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for! the spirit be thine!
By the spirit, when age shall o'ercome thee, thou still shalt enjoy
More indeed, than at first when inconscious, the life of a boy.
Crush that life, and behold its wine running! each deed thou hast done
Dies, revives, goes to work in the world; until e'en as the sun
Looking down on the earth, though clouds spoil him, though tempests efface,
Can find nothing his own deed produced not, must everywhere trace
The results of his past summer-prime, — so, each ray of thy will,
Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long over, shall thrill
Thy whole people, the countless, with ardor, till they too give forth
A like cheer to their sons, who in turn fill the South and the North
With the radiance thy deed was the germ of. Carouse in the past!

But the license of age has its limit; thou diest at last:
As the lion when age dims his eyeball, the rose at her height,
So with man — so his power and his beauty for ever take flight.
No! again a long draught of my soul-wine! Look forth o'er the years!
Thou hast done now with eyes for the actual; begin with the seer's!
Is Saul dead? in the depth of the vale make his tomb — bid arise
A gray mountain of marble heaped four-square, till, built to the skies,
Let it mark where the great First King slumbers: whose fame would ye know?
Up above see the rock's naked face, where the record shall go
In great characters cut by the scribe, — Such was Saul, so he did;
With the sages directing the work, by the populace chid, —
For not half, they 'll affirm, is comprised there! Which fault to amend,
In the grove with his kind grows the cedar, whereon they shall spend
(See, in tablets 't is level before them) their praise, and record
With the gold of the graver, Saul's story, — the statesman's great word

Side by side with the poet's sweet comment. The river's a-wave
With smooth paper-reeds grazing each other when prophet winds rave:
So the pen gives unborn generations their due and their part
In thy being! Then, first of the mighty, thank God that thou art."

XIV.

And behold while I sang . . . But O Thou who didst grant me that day,
And before it not seldom hast granted Thy help to essay,
Carry on, and complete an adventure, — my Shield and my Sword
In that act where my soul was Thy servant, Thy word was my word, —
Still be with me, who then at the summit of human endeavor
And scaling the highest, man's thought could, gazed hopeless as ever
On the new stretch of heaven above me — till, mighty to save,
Just one lift of Thy hand cleared that distance — God's throne from man's grave!
Let me tell out my tale to its ending — my voice to my heart,
Which can scarce dare believe in what marvels last night I took part,
As this morning I gather the fragments, alone with my sheep,

And still fear lest the terrible glory evanish like sleep!
For I wake in the gray dewy covert, while Hebron upheaves
The dawn struggling with night on his shoulder and Kidron retrieves
Slow the damage of yesterday's sunshine.

XV.

I say then, — my song
While I sang thus, assuring the monarch, and ever more strong
Made a proffer of good to console him — he slowly resumed
His old motions and habitudes kingly. The right hand replumed
His black locks to their wonted composure, adjusted the swathes
Of his turban, and see — the huge sweat that his countenance bathes,
He wipes off with the robe; and he girds now his loins as of yore,
And feels slow for the armlets of price, with the clasp set before.
He is Saul, ye remember in glory, — ere error had bent
The broad brow from the daily communion; and still, though much spent
Be the life and the bearing that front you, the same, God did choose,

To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never quite lose.
So sank he along by the tent-prop, till, stayed by the pile
Of his armor and war-cloak and garments, he leaned there awhile,
And sat out my singing, — one arm round the tent-prop, to raise
His bent head, and the other hung slack — till I touched on the praise
I foresaw from all men in all time, to the man patient there;
And thus ended, the harp falling forward. Then first I was 'ware
That he sat, as I say, with my head just above his vast knees
Which were thrust out on each side around me, like oak-roots which please
To encircle a lamb when it slumbers. I looked up to know
If the best I could do had brought solace: he spoke not, but slow
Lifted up the hand slack at his side, till he laid it with care
Soft and grave, but in mild settled will, on my brow: through my hair
The large fingers were pushed, and he bent back my head, with kind power —
All my face back, intent to peruse it, as men do a flower.

Thus held he me there with his great eyes that
scrutinized mine —
And oh, all my heart how it loved him! but where
was the sign?
I yearned — "Could I help thee, my father, invent-
ing a bliss,
I would add to that life of the past, both the future
and this.
I would give thee new life altogether, as good, ages
hence,
As this moment, — had love but the warrant, love's
heart to dispense!"

XVI.

Then the truth came upon me. No harp more — no
song more! outbroke —

XVII.

"I have gone the whole round of creation: I saw
and I spoke:
I, a work of God's hand for that purpose, received
in my brain
And pronounced on the rest of His handwork —
returned Him again
His creation's approval or censure: I spoke as I
saw.
I report, as a man may of God's work — all's love,
yet all's law.
Now I lay down the judgeship He lent me. Each
faculty tasked

To perceive Him, has gained an abyss, where a dew-drop was asked.
Have I knowledge? confounded it shrivels at Wisdom laid bare.
Have I forethought? how purblind, how blank, to the Infinite Care!
Do I task any faculty highest, to image success?
I but open my eyes, — and perfection, no more and no less
In the kind I imagined, full-fronts me, and God is seen God
In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul, and the clod.
And thus looking within and around me, I ever renew
(With that stoop of the soul which in bending upraises it too)
The submission of man's nothing-perfect to God's all-complete,
As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to His feet.
Yet with all this abounding experience, this Deity known,
I shall dare to discover some province, some gift of my own.
There 's a faculty pleasant to exercise, hard to hoodwink,
I am fain to keep still in abeyance, (I laugh as I think)
Lest, insisting to claim and parade in it, wot ye, I worst

E'en the Giver in one gift. — Behold! I could love if I durst!
But I sink the pretension as fearing a man may o'ertake
God's own speed in the one way of love: I abstain, for love's sake. —
What, my soul? see thus far and no farther? when doors great and small,
Nine-and-ninety flew ope at our touch, should the hundredth appall?
In the least things have faith, yet distrust in the greatest of all?
Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift,
That I doubt His own love can compete with it? Here, the parts shift?
Here, the creature surpass the Creator, the end, what Began? —
Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man,
And dare doubt He alone shall not help me, who yet alone can?
Would it ever have entered my mind, the bare will, much less power,
To bestow on this Saul what I sang of, the marvellous dower
Of the life he was gifted and filled with? to make such a soul,
Such a body, and then such an earth for insphering the whole?

And doth it not enter my mind (as my warm tears attest)
These good things being given, to go on, and give one more, the best?
Ay, to save and redeem and restore him, maintain at the height
This perfection, — succeed with life's dayspring, death's minute of night?
Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul, the mistake,
Saul, the failure, the ruin he seems now, — and bid him awake
From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find himself set
Clear and safe in new light and new life, — a new harmony yet
To be run, and continued, and ended — who knows? — or endure!
The man taught enough by life's dream, of the rest to make sure;
By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning intensified bliss,
And the next world's reward and repose, by the struggle in this.

XVIII.

"I believe it! 'tis Thou, God, that givest, 'tis I who receive:
In the first is the last, in Thy will is my power to believe.

All 's one gift: Thou canst grant it, moreover, as prompt to my prayer
As I breathe out this breath, as I open these arms to the air.
From Thy will stream the worlds, life and nature, Thy dread Sabaoth:
I will? — the mere atoms despise me! Why am I not loth
To look that, even that in the face too? why is it I dare
Think but lightly of such impuissance? what stops my despair?
This; — 't is not what man Does which exalts him, but what man Would do!
See the King — I would help him but cannot, the wishes fall through.
Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor to enrich,
To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would — knowing which,
I know that my service is perfect. — Oh, speak through me now!
Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst Thou — so wilt Thou!
So shall crown Thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown —
And Thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down
One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no breath,

Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue
with death!
As Thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty be
proved
Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being
Beloved!
He who did most shall bear most; the strongest
shall stand the most weak.
'T is the weakness in strength that I cry for! my
flesh that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it
shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee: a Man like
to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever! a Hand
like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See
the Christ stand!"

XIX.

I know not too well how I found my way home in
the night.
There were witnesses, cohorts about me, to left and
to right,
Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive, the
aware:
I repressed, I got through them as hardly, as strug-
glingly there,
As a runner beset by the populace famished for
news —

Life or death. The whole earth was awakened, hell loosed with her crews;
And the stars of night beat with emotion, and tingled and shot
Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge: but I fainted not,
For the Hand still impelled me at once and supported, suppressed
All the tumult, and quenched it with quiet, and holy behest,
Till the rapture was shut in itself, and the earth sank to rest.
Anon at the dawn, all that trouble had withered from earth —
Not so much, but I saw it die out in the day's tender birth;
In the gathered intensity brought to the gray of the hills;
In the shuddering forests' held breath; in the sudden wind thrills;
In the startled wild beasts that bore off, each with eye sidling still
Though averted, in wonder and dread; and the birds stiff and chill
That rose heavily, as I approached them, made stupid with awe:
E'en the serpent that slid away silent, — he felt the new law.
The same stared in the white humid faces upturned by the flowers;

The same worked in the heart of the cedar and moved the vine-bowers.
And the little brooks witnessing murmured, persistent and low,
With their obstinate, all but hushed voices — "E'en so! it is so!"

AN EPISTLE

CONTAINING THE

STRANGE MEDICAL EXPERIENCE OF KARSHISH, THE ARAB PHYSICIAN.

Karshish, the picker-up of learning's crumbs,
The not-incurious in God's handiwork
(This man's-flesh He hath admirably made,
Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste,
To coop up and keep down on earth a space
That puff of vapor from His mouth, man's soul) —
To Abib, all-sagacious in our art,
Breeder in me of what poor skill I boast,
Like me inquisitive how pricks and cracks
Befall the flesh through too much stress and strain,
Whereby the wily vapor fain would slip
Back and rejoin its source before the term, —
And aptest in contrivance (under God)
To baffle it by deftly stopping such: —
The vagrant Scholar to his Sage at home
Sends greeting (health and knowledge, fame with peace),
Three samples of true snake-stone — rarer still,
One of the other sort, the melon-shaped,
(But fitter, pounded fine, for charms than drugs)
And writeth now the twenty-second time.

My journeyings were brought to Jericho:
Thus I resume. Who studious in our art

Shall count a little labor unrepaid?
I have shed sweat enough, left flesh and bone
On many a flinty furlong of this land.
Also, the country-side is all on fire
With rumors of a marching hitherward —
Some say Vespasian cometh, some, his son.
A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear;
Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls:
I cried and threw my staff and he was gone.
Twice have the robbers stripped and beaten me,
And once a town declared me for a spy;
But at the end, I reach Jerusalem,
Since this poor covert where I pass the night,
This Bethany, lies scarce the distance thence
A man with plague-sores at the third degree
Runs till he drops down dead. Thou laughest here!
'Sooth, it elates me, thus reposed and safe,
To void the stuffing of my travel-scrip
And share with thee whatever Jewry yields.
A viscid choler is observable
In tertians, I was nearly bold to say;
And falling-sickness hath a happier cure
Than our school wots of: there 's a spider here
Weaves no web, watches on the ledge of tombs,
Sprinkled with mottles on an ash-gray back;
Take five and drop them . . . but who knows his mind,
The Syrian run-a-gate I trust this to?
His service payeth me a sublimate
Blown up his nose to help the ailing eye.

Best wait: I reach Jerusalem at morn,
There set in order my experiences,
Gather what most deserves and give thee all —
Or I might add, Judea's gum-tragacanth
Scales off in purer flakes, shines clearer-grained,
Cracks 'twixt the pestle and the porphyry,
In fine exceeds our produce. Scalp-disease
Confounds me, crossing so with leprosy —
Thou hadst admired one sort I gained at Zoar —
But zeal outruns discretion. Here I end.

Yet stay: my Syrian blinketh gratefully,
Protesteth his devotion is my price —
Suppose I write what harms not, though he steal?
I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush,
What set me off a-writing first of all.
An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang!
For, be it this town's barrenness — or else
The Man had something in the look of him —
His case has struck me far more than 't is worth.
So, pardon if — (lest presently I lose
In the great press of novelty at hand
The care and pains this somehow stole from me)
I bid thee take the thing while fresh in mind,
Almost in sight — for, wilt thou have the truth?
The very man is gone from me but now,
Whose ailment is the subject of discourse.
Thus then, and let thy better wit help all.

'T is but a case of mania — subinduced
By epilepsy, at the turning-point

Of trance prolonged unduly some three days:
When, by the exhibition of some drug
Or spell, exorcisation, stroke of art
Unknown to me and which 't were well to know,
The evil thing out-breaking all at once
Left the man whole and sound of body indeed, —
But, flinging (so to speak) life's gates too wide,
Making a clear house of it too suddenly,
The first conceit that entered might inscribe
Whatever it was minded on the wall
So plainly at that vantage, as it were,
(First come, first served) that nothing subsequent
Attaineth to erase those fancy-scrawls
The just-returned and new-established soul
Hath gotten now so thoroughly by heart
That henceforth she will read or these or none.
And first — the man's own firm conviction rests
That he was dead (in fact they buried him) —
That he was dead and then restored to life
By a Nazarene physician of his tribe: —
'Sayeth, the same bade "Rise," and he did rise.
"Such cases are diurnal," thou wilt cry.
Not so this figment! — not, that such a fume,
Instead of giving way to time and health,
Should eat itself into the life of life,
As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones, and all!
For see, how he takes up the after-life.
The man — it is one Lazarus a Jew,
Sanguine, proportioned, fifty years of age,
The body's habit wholly laudable,

As much, indeed, beyond the common health
As he were made and put aside to show.
Think, could we penetrate by any drug
And bathe the wearied soul and worried flesh,
And bring it clear and fair, by three days' sleep!
Whence has the man the balm that brightens all?
This grown man eyes the world now like a child.
Some elders of his tribe, I should premise,
Led in their friend, obedient as a sheep,
To bear my inquisition. While they spoke,
Now sharply, now with sorrow, — told the case, —
He listened not except I spoke to him,
But folded his two hands and let them talk,
Watching the flies that buzzed: and yet no fool.
And that 's a sample how his years must go.
Look if a beggar, in fixed middle-life,
Should find a treasure, — can he use the same
With straitened habits and with tastes starved small,
And take at once to his impoverished brain
The sudden element that changes things,
That sets the undreamed-of rapture at his hand,
And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust?
Is he not such an one as moves to mirth —
Warily parsimonious, when no need,
Wasteful as drunkenness at undue times?
All prudent counsel as to what befits
The golden mean, is lost on such an one.
The man's fantastic will is the man's law.
So here — we call the treasure knowledge, say, —
Increased beyond the fleshly faculty —

Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,
Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing heaven:
The man is witless of the size, the sum,
The value in proportion of all things,
Or whether it be little or be much.
Discourse to him of prodigious armaments
Assembled to besiege his city now,
And of the passing of a mule with gourds —
'T is one! Then take it on the other side,
Speak of some trifling fact — he will gaze rapt
With stupor at its very littleness —
(Far as I see) as if in that indeed
He caught prodigious import, whole results;
And so will turn to us the bystanders
In ever the same stupor (note this point)
That we too see not with his opened eyes.
Wonder and doubt come wrongly into play,
Preposterously, at cross purposes.
Should his child sicken unto death, — why, look
For scarce abatement of his cheerfulness,
Or pretermission of his daily craft!
While a word, gesture, glance, from that same child
At play or in the school or laid asleep,
Will startle him to an agony of fear,
Exasperation, just as like. Demand
The reason why — "'t is but a word," object —
"A gesture" — he regards thee as our lord
Who lived there in the pyramid alone,
Looked at us (dost thou mind?) when, being young,
We both would unadvisedly recite

Some charm's beginning, from that book of his,
Able to bid the sun throb wide and burst
All into stars, as suns grown old are wont.
Thou and the child have each a veil alike
Thrown o'er your heads, from under which ye both
Stretch your blind hands and trifle with a match
Over a mine of Greek fire, did ye know!
He holds on firmly to some thread of life —
(It is the life to lead perforcedly)
Which runs across some vast distracting orb
Of glory on either side that meagre thread,
Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet —
The spiritual life around the earthly life:
The law of that is known to him as this,
His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here.
So is the man perplext with impulses
Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,
Proclaiming what is right and wrong across, —
And not along, this black thread through the blaze —
"It should be" balked by "here it cannot be."
And oft the man's soul springs into his face
As if he saw again and heard again
His sage that bade him "Rise" and he did rise.
Something, a word, a tick of the blood within
Admonishes: then back he sinks at once
To ashes, who was very fire before,
In sedulous recurrence to his trade
Whereby he earneth him the daily bread;
And studiously the humbler for that pride,
Professedly the faultier that he knows

God's secret, while he holds the thread of life.
Indeed the especial marking of the man
Is prone submission to the heavenly will -
Seeing it, what it is, and why it is.
'Sayeth, he will wait patient to the last
For that same death which must restore his being
To equilibrium, body loosening soul
Divorced even now by premature full growth:
He will live, nay, it pleaseth him to live
So long as God please, and just how God please.
He even seeketh not to please God more
(Which meaneth, otherwise) than as God please.
Hence, I perceive not he affects to preach
The doctrine of his sect whate'er it be —
Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do:
How can he give his neighbor the real ground,
His own conviction? Ardent as he is —
Call his great truth a lie, why still the old
"Be it as God please" reassureth him.
I probed the sore as thy disciple should,
"How, beast," said I, "this stolid carelessness
Sufficeth thee, when Rome is on her march
To stamp out like a little spark thy town,
Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once?"
He merely looked with his large eyes on me.
The man is apathetic, you deduce?
Contrariwise he loves both old and young,
Able and weak, affects the very brutes
And birds — how say I? flowers of the field —
As a wise workman recognizes tools

In a master's workshop, loving what they make.
Thus is the man as harmless as a lamb:
Only impatient, let him do his best,
At ignorance and carelessness and sin —
An indignation which is promptly curbed:
As when in certain travel I have feigned
To be an ignoramus in our art
According to some preconceived design,
And happed to hear the land's practitioners
Steeped in conceit sublimed by ignorance,
Prattle fantastically on disease,
Its cause and cure — and I must hold my peace!

Thou wilt object — why have I not ere this
Sought out the sage himself, the Nazarene
Who wrought this cure, inquiring at the source,
Conferring with the frankness that befits?
Alas! it grieveth me, the learned leech
Perished in a tumult many years ago,
Accused, — our learning's fate, — of wizardry,
Rebellion, to the setting up a rule
And creed prodigious as described to me.
His death, which happened when the earthquake fell
(Prefiguring, as soon appeared, the loss
To occult learning in our lord the sage
Who lived there in the pyramid alone)
Was wrought by the mad people — that 's their wont!
On vain recourse, as I conjecture it,
To his tried virtue, for miraculous help —
How could he stop the earthquake? That 's their way!

NOTES.

NOTES

ON

CHRISTMAS-EVE AND EASTER-DAY.

THESE two poems were written at Florence in 1850, and published in London in the same year. Numerous changes have been made in the text since the first edition. They are cited in the Notes.

In annotating the text, my principle has been simply to explain allusions, however simple, and to try to throw light on constructions which may seem obscure to the reader who is not familiar with Browning's peculiar method. The Biblical allusions I have explained by citations, even where they were well known, because it is often pleasant to be able to trace a phrase on the instant to chapter and verse. Moreover, the student will find it interesting to observe Browning's extraordinary familiarity with Scripture. In defining words I have preferred to err on the side of over-explicitness, because the effect of a line is lost if the reader must stop to consult a dictionary, or make a rough guess at the meaning. But I have tried to remember that this Selection is not a text-book, and so have barred out all merely curious notes.

I have called attention, in the introductory essay, to the fact that this poem (the title would indicate that we are to consider the two together as one work) is unique, because in it Browning speaks in his own proper person. *One Word More* (*Men and Women*) is the only other

poem in which he avowedly does so. It is often easy in his other works to infer the face behind the mask, but, like Shakespeare's Sonnets, these two poems must gather significance from their personal character.

3. *Five minutes full I waited.*

There is a long break in the time between l. 2 and l. 3. The narrator retraces his steps to the moment, perhaps a half-hour before, when he had entered the chapel. A glance at l. 185, below, will show the somewhat obscure connection.

70. *Pattens.*

Wooden clogs worn to keep the feet dry.

73. *A lance in rest.*

Ancient armor has a projection on the right side of the coat-of-mail which supported the lance, and was called "the rest." The lance in rest was an excellent defence.

81. *Like the Penitent Thief.*

Luke xxiii. 40. Of course no resemblance is asserted except that of previous occupation.

89. *Gallio.*

See Acts xvii. 12 fol.: "And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, 'If it were a matter of wrong or of wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you. But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters.' And he drave them from the judgment-seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment-seat. And Gallio cared for none of these things."

92. *Tallyho.*

The cry to urge on the hounds.

102. *St. John's Candlestick.*

See Rev. i. 12 and 20: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches; and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."

105. *Grand Inquisitor.*

The highest office of the Inquisition was first held in Spain by Torquemada in 1483. He was president for life of the Supreme Inquisition. During the time that he held the office (fifteen years) 8800 people were burned alive.

108. *Seven Churches.*

See on l. 102 above.

115. "*Shares.*"

The forced rhyme of this whole introduction is a part of the mockery with which Browning treats the situation. Whenever he throws aside the irony, he changes the tone of the verse by choosing his rhymes seriously. (See l. 187 fol.) As soon as he returns to the ridicule the rhymes become droll again. (See ls. 227, 228.)

120. *Marriage vestiment.*

See Matt. xxii. 11 fol. Vestment is the usual form, but Browning coins this correctly enough from the Latin *vestimentum.*

132. *Pentacle.*

A six-pointed star formed by two equal triangles. It was a mystic figure much used by astrologers of the Middle Ages.

133. *Conventicle.*

The word was opprobriously applied to assemblies of dissenters from the Church of England. It means simply a small gathering.

143. *Pig-of-lead.*

An oblong mass of crude lead, weighing two hundred and fifty pounds.

157. *In severance.*

Loose, without connection.

170. *Dew of Hermon.*

See Ps. cxxxiii. 3: "As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion." Hermon (Mount Sion) is located at the southern extremity of the Lebanon range of hills, thirty miles southwest of Damascus.

222. *Pharaoh*, etc.

See Gen. xl. 16 fol.

238. *Joseph.*

It will be recalled that Joseph interpreted the baker's dream of the three baskets, and declared it to prophesy the death which Pharaoh was preparing for him. But the preacher finds in the dream a proof of the Trinity, and the adoring people prefer his absurdity to Joseph's plain sense.

533. *The angel's measuring-rod.*

See Rev. xxi. 15 fol.: "And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof and the wall thereof."

557. *Liar*, etc.

The exclamation is the quick retort to the suggestion by his hearer, that the story is a lie or a dream.

565. *Basilica.*

The word originally meant a hall of justice, but, as the Roman basilicas suggested the form of the early Christian churches, the name came to be applied to the latter.

567. *Architrave.*

The lower part of the structure (entablature) which rests directly upon the columns. The frieze and cornice are immediately above the architrave.

576. *Baldachin.*

A structure in the form of a canopy, supported by pillars and placed over an altar.

582. *Like Behemoth*, etc.

For God's praise of Behemoth, see Job xl. 15 fol.

583. *At the silver bell's shrill tinkling.*

At the elevation of the host (sacrament) a bell is rung, and the multitude at the sound fall on their knees.

600. *I died*, etc.

See Rev. i. 18.

634. *Judgment drops*, etc.

The figure is of a tower which leans from the perpendicular, and becomes both unsightly and unsafe.

656. *The antique, sovereign Intellect.*

From the middle of the century before Christ, till the end of the reign of Augustus (14 A. D.), it was literally true that Intellect ruled the world. Julius Cæsar, Augustus, and Mæcenas were all distinguished patrons of letters and learning. Not only is the age resplendent with brilliant names, but it is also true that government was never administered more in accordance with the logic of history.

668. *Sallust.*

Caius Sallustius Crispus was born in 86 B. C., and was a prominent man during the rise of Cæsar. He became governor of Numidia, and returned to Rome with immense

wealth. He lived in the greatest luxury, and devoted himself to the study and writing of history. Of his greatest works only fragments are extant, the rest having probably been wantonly destroyed.

676. *True Christian Art.*

It was characteristic of Christian art to prefer moral significance to beauty and grace of form. A slight degree of moral meaning, or even of moral intention, outweighed every other quality. Art was judged by ethical, not by æsthetic standards. Pictures of saints, of martyrs, of the Deity, were acceptable, no matter how faulty the anatomy or repulsive the design. A ban was laid, in art as in life, upon human nature, unless distorted or perverted to conform to certain conventional, religious ideals of restraint, suffering, and deprivation. A premium was thus set upon imitation of traditional models, upon disregard of nature or absolute infidelity to her facts, upon all that leaves art beggared of imagination, originality, truth to nature, accuracy, and taste. With the exception of a few artists whose genius was great enough to assert itself in spite of these tendencies, art degenerated into a mere fanciful symbolism (*Portents*, l. 675) or a Chamber of Horrors.

678. *Terpander's bird.*

The nightingale. Terpander was born in 676 B. C., and was called the Father of Greek music. He lived at Antissa, the town which professed to contain the grave of Orpheus.

684. *Aphrodite.*

The Greek goddess of Love, identified with the Roman Venus.

755. *A Colossus.*

A gigantic statue. The name was first applied to that at Rhodes.

799. *Halle, Weimar, etc.*

University towns of Germany. Halle is in Saxony, on the Saale. The university is famous for its theology. Weimar is on the Ilm. Goethe, Schiller, Herder, and Wieland all lived there. Cassel has no university, but has excellent opportunities for study. Frankfort is on the Oder, in the province of Brandenburg. Göttingen is in Hanover, on the Seine.

825. *Preludious.*

An instance of Browning's license of coinage, especially bold when he wants a droll rhyme.

841. *A hake of undressed tow.*

Hake is still provincially used to denote a hank or bunch of flax or tow ready for the spinner.

846. *Some thrilling view of the surplice question.*

It may be hazarded that more intellect and more discussion have been lavished in England for the last twenty years upon the distinction between High Church and Low Church than upon the relation of Ireland to England. But not many Englishmen are sufficiently outside of the conflict to take so clear a view as Browning of the actual merits of the case.

901. *Drouthy.*

The form *drouth* is more commonly used in England than drought. Here the word means simply *dry, squeaking.*

970. *When A got leave*, etc.

The letters of early alphabets were originally hieroglyphs, made out of rough drawings of the objects to be denoted. A represented the head of the ox, being the initial letter of the Hebrew word *Aleph*, an ox. B represented a tent (*Beth*); G, the head and neck of a camel (*Gimel*).

982. *Harvey.*

Physician to James I. and Charles I. He discovered the circulation of the blood.

1004. *Other birds.*

For purposes of poetry the bat may be called a bird, perhaps. But it is well to remember that the species belongs actually to the *mammalia.*

1056. *Fane.*

A temple. Do you insist upon worshipping outside the usual method, and pointing a finger of direction to your own favorite road, although it leads away from the one trodden for ages by worshipful souls?

1089. *Levigable.*

Capable of being reduced to fine powder.

1112. *The Middle Verb.*

The reflexive form of the verb.

1113. *Turk-like,* etc.

That is, disputing fiercely over the technicalities of Greek metre. The anapæst is an unusual foot in trimeter.

1115. *The halt and maimed "Iketides."*

A tragedy of Æschylus (*The Suppliants*), which has come down to us in a much mutilated form.

1126. *Herr Heine* (*before his fever*).

Heine's life up to 1848 was one of the wildest dissipation. At that time he was violently ill, lost his sight, and was never restored to health. Soon after, he renounced his infidelity.

1131. *Meticulous.*

Fearful, timid.

1257. *Raree-show.*

Peep-show; rare show. The word perpetuates a mispronunciation of rare.

1283. *Pascal.*

A celebrated French philosopher, mathematician, and religionist (1623–1622).

1307. *Breccia.*

Pudding-stone.

FIRST READINGS OF CHRISTMAS-EVE.

1. The first edition has

> "Out of the little chapel I flung
> Into the fresh night-air again.
> Five minutes I waited, held my tongue."

211. The first edition has "light."

283. The first edition has "the" for *that.*

444. The first edition has "I remembered."

602. The first edition has "sat I there."

682. The first edition has

> "Till a filthy saint rebuked the gust
> With which he chanced to get a sight
> . . . . .
> He glanced a thought above the toes of."

716. The first edition has "the senses."

722. The first edition has "And it tight."

885. The first edition has "Gave, for residuum."

921. The first edition has "by" for *with*.

954. The first edition has "the more."

966. The first edition has "where" for *whence*.

1015. The first edition has "his head."

1097. The first edition has "the damage."

1149. The first edition has "the plainest."

1150. The first edition has "this world."

1164. The first edition has "Sending me on a pilgrimage."

1303. The first edition has "At a word."

1304. The first edition has "Its river-pulse."

1310. The first edition has "That the waterless cup."

1356. The first edition has "Without my own made."

1373. The first edition has "in" for *of*.

EASTER-DAY.

THE second part of this poem will seem to most readers even more stupendous than Christmas-Eve. It is said that modern poets are half ashamed to mention God or Christ. Not so this poet. The vital question, "What does life mean?" seems to me more completely answered in this poem than in any utterance which the world has heard since the Sermon on the Mount. The *reasonableness* of a probation upon earth, the definite-

ness of God's command to men and women, the certainty which follows choice — of evil or of good — are all given the force of high poetic expression. Browning tries to reveal the divine method of utilizing the great moments of the soul's life to make spiritual the long run of human experience. In a dream, a vision, — whether in the body or out of the body who can say? — the soul meets the announcement of the Judgment-Day. He has chosen earth. The effort to realize the unseen has wearied him. He has revelled in life's joys with a delusive hope of lifting by and by his eyes to heaven. Now comes the supreme surprise. A voice says, "The world for thee! Take it!" But in the same instant are revealed to the soul the barrenness of knowledge, the incompleteness of beauty, the poverty of love compared with the things which God has prepared for them that love him. The soul is granted each request for future freedom in this world, but each is given with a scorn as bitter as death and a reproach as deep as hell. At last the soul sees the world in its true meaning, — a vestibule, fair it is true, but empty, — leading to a palace of divine beauty. The children who linger playing outside over their heaps of moneys, of knowledges, of love, are blind to the light that streams from the royal presence-chamber. When a sense of this fatal and stupid loss at last forces itself upon the soul he entreats but one boon, — that he may be permitted, at least, to pursue life as if he had not forfeited the chance of salvation.

> "Only let me go on, go on,
> Still hoping ever and anon
> To reach one eve the Better Land."

Now the Voice first gives hope of forgiveness and of renewed opportunity. To realize the value of proba-

tion, and to desire that it may continue, is a long step toward fulfilling the end of life. And so the curtain of the poem drops upon the sunlight of Easter morn.

154. *Coleoptera.*

An order of insects, including the beetles.

160. *A Grignon with the Regent's crest.*

Grignon was a French antiquary (1723–1780). He conducted many important excavations, and was also a practical worker in metals. His mark on a snuff-box is proof of its artistic value.

169. *A Semitic guess.*

The group of Semitic languages, of which the Hebrew and Assyrian are members, has given philologists more room for guesses than all other languages together.

194. *Dionysus Zagrius.*

Zagrius was a surname of the mystic Dionysus (Bacchus). The legends regarding him are almost inextricably confused, the traditions of various times and countries relating to analogous deities having been transferred to him.

393. *The Lucumons.*

The Tarquins, so-called from the name of the elder, — Lucumo.

394. *Fourier's scheme.*

Fourier was a French writer on socialism (1772–1837) who devised an elaborate plan for the life of a community.

447. *Tice.*

Entice, but not an abbreviation.

488. *Queen Mab.*

"She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes
In shape no bigger than an agate-stone
On the forefinger of an alderman,
Drawn with a team of little atomies
Athwart men's noses as they lie asleep.
. . . . . .
And in this state she gallops night by night
Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love."
Romeo and Juliet, Act I. Sc. 4.

574. *That was too hard.*

Compare the *Rubaiyat* by Omar Khayyam, Canto 66:

"I must abjure the balm of life: I must,
Scared by some after-reckoning, ta'en on trust,
Or lured with hope of some diviner drink
To fill the cup — when crumbled into dust!"

630. *A new tract of death.*

See Gen. xix. 28: "And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord; and he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace."

670. *Here the probation was for thee.*

Compare the Pope's soliloquy, in the *Ring and the Book:*

"The moral sense grows but by exercise,
'Tis even as man grew, probatively
Initiated in Godship, set to make
A fairer moral world than this he finds.
. . . . . .
Life is probation, and this earth no goal,
But starting-point for man, compel him strive,
Which means in man as good as reach the goal."

672. *It must choose betwixt.*

Miss E. D. West, in an excellent article on *Browning as a Preacher* (*Littell's Living Age*, Dec. 23, 1871), says: "The idea

of a struggle and a wrestling in which the *wills* of men are to be engaged — the central idea of early and mediæval Christian thought — is recognized fully and distinctly by Browning in all that he has written. He holds that men's business in this world is labor and strife and conquest, and not merely free, unconscious growth and harmonious development. He differs thoroughly from the modern thinking, which sees no moral evil distinct from and antagonistic to good; and again and again, directly or indirectly, his poems let us see how wide is his separation, both in belief and feeling, from the many poets of these present days, who have returned to the idea round which the old Greek poetry had all revolved, of the powerlessness of man's will and the drifting of his life before an unalterable destiny. In a recent criticism of Browning he is distinguished as being pre-eminently the poet of impulse. This he doubtless is, but it seems to me that his *chief* point of difference from the majority of modern poets is in his being emphatically the poet of the will."

712. *The filthy shall be filthy still.*

Com. Rev. xxii. 11.

748. *The bee-bird and the aloe-flower.*

The bee-bird is the spotted fly-catcher, so called from its catching bees. The aloe belongs to a genus of evergreen plants. Its blossom is symbolical among the Mohammedans.

798. *Buonarroti's brow.*

Michael Angelo Buonarroti.

SAUL.

THE account of the strange relation which existed between Saul and David is contained in 1 Samuel xvi. 14 fol.:

"But the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. And Saul's servants said unto him, 'Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee. Let our lord now command thy servants, which are before thee, to seek out a man who is a cunning player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well.' And Saul said unto his servants, 'Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me.' Then answered one of the servants, and said, 'Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Beth-lehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him.' Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse and said, 'Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep.' And Jesse took an ass laden with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a kid, and sent them by David his son unto Saul. And David came to Saul and stood before him: and he loved him greatly; and he became his armor-bearer. And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, 'Let David, I pray thee, stand before me; for he hath found favor in my sight.' And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him."

The first nine sections or strophes of *Saul* were published in No. VII. of *Bells and Pomegranates*, in 1845.

The last ten sections were added, and the whole poem published in *Men and Women*, in 1855. The first version was printed in short lines, three feet in one and two in the next. But when the revision was made, it was printed in the more suitable and dignified pentameter. The various verbal changes are specified in the Notes.

David's song to Saul is divided into two great parts. The first seven strophes are mere repetition of music and words with which Saul has long been familiar. The senses — almost extinct in the long fast and agony — must be called back by well-known tones. So we have

I. The charms which the brutes know:

(*a*) To the sheep.
(*b*) " " quail.
(*c*) " " crickets.
(*d*) " " jerboa.

II. The songs which mark the great epochs of human life:

(*a*) The reaper's song.
(*b*) " requiem.
(*c*) " marriage chorus.
(*d*) " battle march.
(*e*) " chant of the priests.

The remaining strophes are given to the song especially inspired by the present need of Saul. The soul has been rescued from drowning in the depths of despair. He must now be made to feel that life is worth living. He must see that the universe is a harmony and not a discord. But to the learned and thoughtful mind it must seem a chaos of evil, unless the prophet's hand can lift the veil, and show a life beyond this, where

infinite desire meets infinite satisfaction. As the boy sings, the prophetic vision is given to him. He celebrates the praise of one gift of God after another, until, by instinct, he reaches the last and highest gift hitherto unseen by any eye. He scales the mountain-top which no foot of man has trod. The love of God in Christ, who has brought life and immortality to light, is revealed to him. He approaches this secret by a number of steps.

III. The song inspired by the need of the moment celebrates

(*a*) The joy of mere living.
(*b*) " " " vast human life.
(*c*) " " " posthumous fame.
(*d*) " hope of immortality.
(*e*) " belief in a personal help and a Divine Love in Christ.

1. *Abner.*

The captain of Saul's host. (See 1 Sam. xiv. 50.) The Bible narrative does not specify by whom David was received.

45. *Jerboa.*

A small jumping animal, having very long hind legs and a long tail. It is also called the jumping hare. It has its burrow in the ground, and watches from it for small prey.

58. *Buttress an arch.*

A fine figure to describe the forming of a line of battle.

60. *As the Levites*, etc.

See 1 Chron. xxiii. 30. It is a part of the duty of this priestly family "to stand every morning to thank and praise the Lord, and likewise at even."

73. *The hunt of the bear.*

It will be remembered that David not long afterwards killed both a lion and a bear which attacked his flock. (See 1 Sam. xvii. 34 fol.) He was doubtless already a successful hunter.

80. *Thy father.*

Saul was the son of Kish.

82. *Thy mother*, etc.

Neither mother nor brothers of Saul are mentioned in the Bible.

89. *That boyhood of wonder and hope.*

Samuel anointed Saul and prophesied his future greatness, when the young man was sent out on a peaceful search after his father's lost asses. (See 1 Sam. x.)

162. *More indeed.*

Cf. *Rabbi Ben Ezra*:

> "Grow old along with me!
> The best is yet to be,
> The last of life, for which the first was made:
> Our times are in His hand
> Who saith 'A whole I planned,
> Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!'"

93. *My shield and my sword.*

Cf. 1 Sam. xvii. 45 fol.: "Then said David to the Philistine [Goliath], 'Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts.'"

202. *Evanish.*

An intensive form of the verb "to vanish."

204. *Kidron.*

(Kedron or Cedron), a brook near Jerusalem.

230. *As men do a flower.*

Browning used this comparison fourteen years before in *Pippa Passes*, Sc. ii. l. 4:

> "I overlean
> This length of hair and lustrous front — they turn
> Like an entire flower upward — eyes — lips — last
> Your chin — no, last your throat turns — 'tis their scent
> Pulls my face down upon you!"

281. *The dream, the probation, the prelude*, etc.

The remainder of this strophe contains the pith of Browning's theology.

291. *Sabaoth.*

Hosts (Hebrew).

310. *A man like to me.*

The point of this passage must not be missed by forgetting that it is supposed to have been uttered more than a thousand years before the birth of Christ, and long before man had conceived of immortality, — much less of redemption from sin.

318. *The whole earth was awakened.*

Says Mr. Dowden, in his excellent essay on Browning: "Mr. Browning's most characteristic feeling for nature appears in his rendering of those aspects of sky or earth or sea, of sunset or noonday or dawn, which seem to acquire some sudden and passionate significance; which seem to be charged with some spiritual secret eager for disclosure; in his rendering of those moments which betray the passion at the heart of things, which thrill and tingle with prophetic fire. When lightning searches for the guilty lovers, Ottima and Sebald, like an angelic sword plunged into the gloom; when the tender twilight, with its one chrysolite star, grows aware, and the light

and shade make up a spell, and the forests by their mystery and sound and silence mingle together two human lives forever; when the apparition of the moon-rainbow appears gloriously after storm, and Christ is in his heaven; when to David the stars shoot out the pain of pent knowledge, and in the gray of the hills at morning there dwells a gathered intensity, — then Nature rises from her sweet ways of use and wont and shows herself the Priestess, the Pythoness, the Divinity which she is. Or rather, through nature, the spirit of God addresses itself to the spirit of man."

FIRST READINGS OF SAUL.

6. *Be bright*, etc.

The first version has "Be brightened. The water be wet."

8. *Not a sound*, etc.

The first version has "No sound," and substitutes "or" for *nor* after *prayer*.

9. *To betoken*, etc.

The first version has

> "To betoken that Saul and the Spirit
> Have gone their dread ways."

10. *And that, faint*, etc.

This line was inserted in 1855.

13. *Just broken.*

The first version has "As thou brak'st them."

14. *Were now.*

The first version omits *now*.

19. *That extends.*
The first version has "That leads."

22. *But spoke.*
The first version has "And" for *But.*

23. *At the first.*
The first version has "And first."

26. *Against it, gigantic.*
The first version has "gigantic, against it."

30. *He relaxed not.*
The first version has "So he went not."

42. *Each leave.*
The first version has "Leave each."

50. *Grasps at hand.*
The first version omits *at.*

54. *The land has none left.*
The first version has "The land is left none."

58. *Wherein.*
The first version has "When."

69. *Not a muscle*, etc.
The first version has "No muscle." "No sinew."

70. *Oh, the wild joys.*
The first version has "And the wild joys."

71. *The strong rending.*
The first version has "The rending their boughs from the palm-trees."

72. *Of the plunge.*

The first version has "A" for *the*. *The hunt of the bear.* The first version has "The haunt of the bear."

76. *Bulrushes.*

The first version has "tall rushes."

77. *That the water.*

The first version omits *That.*

78. *Man's life, the mere living.*

The first version has "Man's life here, mere living."

79. *All the heart.*

The first version omits *all.*

81. *With the armies.*

The first version has "to the wolf hunt."

83. *The low song.*

The first version omits *low.*

88. *Strained true.*

The first version has "so true."

89. *Of wonder.*

The first version has "with wonder."

90. *Of the future*, etc.

The first version has "in the future, the eye's eagle scope."

92. *And all gifts.*

The first version has "Oh, all gifts."

93. *On one head*, etc.

This passage has been so much altered that we give the first version complete:

> "On one head the joy and the pride,
> Even rage like the throe
> That opes the rock, helps its glad labor,
> And lets the gold go —
> And ambition that sees a sun lead it —
> Oh, all of these — all
> Combine to unite in one creature —
> Saul!"

AN EPISTLE.

17. *Snake-stone.*

A stone or some hardened vegetable substance popularly supposed to cure the bite of the most poisonous snakes.

28. *Vespasian.*

(Emperor of Rome, 69–79) conquered all Judea during his reign, and destroyed Jerusalem. This allusion approximately fixes the date of the events of the poem. The invasion was in 70 A. D.

42. *A viscid choler*, etc.

Thickened or ropy bile, which Karshish had discovered to be a symptom in that intermittent fever called tertian fever, because its paroxysms return once in three days.

44. *Falling sickness.*

Epilepsy. Cf. *Julius Cæsar*, Act I., Sc. 2, l. 256.

49. *Run-a-gate.*

A corruption of renegade, a fugitive, a vagabond.

55. *Gum-tragacanth.*

A gum of great toughness, obtained from various plants.

109. *Sanguine.*

Having abundant blood and active circulation.

177. *Greek fire.*

This precursor of gunpowder was a highly inflammable substance which would burn under water. Its invention is usually ascribed to Callinicus of Heliopolis, in 688 A. D., but it was probably imported from India somewhat earlier. In any case there is an anachronism in this allusion. See note on l. 28 above.

281. *Blue flowering borage.*

This herb was formerly supposed to have wonderful exhilarating properties. Like some other plants of the same order, borage contains nitrate of potash.

291. *Ridge of hills*, etc.

Browning finds a peculiarly weird effect in low-lying hills. Cf. "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came.*"

308. *Face.*

Cf. *Saul*, l. 310.

310. *But Love I gave thee.*

I can add no better comment, as the final one upon these four great spiritual poems, than a few lines from Browning himself. In *A Death in the Desert* he describes the last hour of St. John. It is spent in speaking such words as John believes the disciples will most need. He says:

> "I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ
> Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
> All questions in the earth and out of it,
> And has so far advanced thee to be wise.

Wouldst thou unprove this to re-prove the proved?
In life's mere minute, with power to use that proof,
Leave knowledge and revert to how it sprung?
Thou hast it; use it and forthwith, or die!

"For I say, this is death and the sole death,
When a man's loss comes to him from his gain,
Darkness from light, from knowledge ignorance,
And lack of love from love made manifest;
A lamp's death when, replete with oil, it chokes;
A stomach's when, surcharged with food, it starves.
With ignorance was surety of a cure.
When man, appalled at nature, questioned first,
'What if there lurk a might behind this might?'
He needed satisfaction God could give,
And did give, as ye have the written word:
But when he finds might still redouble might,
Yet asks, 'Since all is might, what use of will?'—
Will, the one source of might,—he being man
With a man's will and a man's might, to teach
In little how the two combine in large,—
That man has turned round on himself and stands,
Which in the course of nature is, to die.

"And when man questioned, 'What if there be love
Behind the will and might, as real as they?'—
He needed satisfaction God could give,
And did give, as ye have the written word:
But when, beholding that love everywhere,
He reasons, 'Since such love is everywhere,
And since ourselves can love and would be loved,
We ourselves make the love, and Christ was not,'—
How shall ye help this man who knows himself,
That he must love and would be loved again,
Yet, owning his own love that proveth Christ,
Rejecteth Christ through very need of Him?
The lamp o'erswims with oil, the stomach flags
Loaded with nurture, and that man's soul dies."

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